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UNKNOWN

FANTASY FICTION

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MAY·1940

THE ROARING TRUMPET

by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP and FLETCHER PRATT

"Sorry, Watkins
—*but we're cutting down*"

THAT'S the explanation they gave him, but they were letting him go for another reason entirely . . . one that Watkins didn't even suspect. Without realizing it, he had offended a number of the firm's best customers and they had complained to the boss. It was sort of tragic . . . to have this happen just when he thought he was getting some place. A good man, Watkins—and an ambitious one—but just a little bit careless.*

You can't get away with it

Maybe a few super-employees get away with *halitosis (bad breath), but lesser ones shouldn't even try. This offensive condition, of which anyone may be guilty, is the fault unpardonable in business, and social life. Business firms should insist that their employees use Listerine Antiseptic every day, to take precautions against offending.

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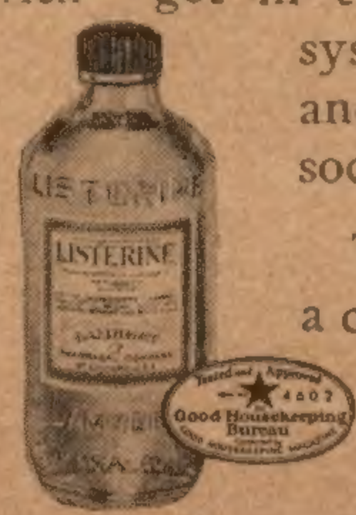

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The whole trend today—legislation, spirit, action—is to put men back to work, raise earning and spending power, *give every man a fair chance to work out his own salvation.*

The road to success remains unchanged but, bear this in mind, *what it takes to win is radically different!*

No employer today would dare risk an important post in the hands of a man who had not learned the lesson of '29. Why should he, when right at this moment he can pick and choose and get almost any man he wants at his own price?

Business organizations are rebuilding—reorganizing for the new conditions. Before it is over every man and every method will be judged in the cold light of reason and experience—then dropped, remade or retained. This spells real opportunity for the man who can meet the test—but heaven help the man who still tries to meet today's problems from yesterday's standpoint! Out of the multitude still jobless there are sure to be many frantically eager to prove him wrong and take his place.

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COVER BY M. ISIP

Illustrations by: Cartier, Hewitt, Isip and Schneemann

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OF THINGS BEYOND

It is the policy of Unknown to make certainties as uncertain as possible—or hadn't you noticed that? It is our firm belief that life is more interesting for just an occasional "Are you *sure?*" peeping out of that solid, safe wall of conventional fact.

That we include such purely amusing items as the current "Mad Hatter," and such purely fantastic elements as "The Roaring Trumpet" has nothing to do with the case. They're just to keep the reader going. Our real effort is directed at things like "None But Lucifer"—though we can't always hope for such perfect timing as we had on that story. It would have been out of date if it had appeared three weeks later—and "Death's Deputy."

Next month we bring another of the kind we really seek, "But Without Horns," by Norvell W. Page. It is not an adventurous, Prester John story; it takes place in modern America. It's one of the "pure fantasy—so far" type. But it is also one of the inevitables—the story of the man-after-man, the superman.

About once in a million years, the particular race of animate things that rules the world is overthrown. Something new and better takes its place. Reptiles ruled once—and were defeated by mammals.

Man rules today.

If experience teaches anything, it teaches that man's mastery will be challenged—challenged by a new and better race. It is absolutely inevitable, as certain as fate.

Whence will this new race come? From Man himself, as the mammals that destroyed the rule of reptiles came from the reptiles. Somewhere, some one of these days, a child will be born that is not quite—human. That happens frequently, of course—freaks. Mutations. But this new freak—this mutant—will be not only changed, but better than man.

In nature, two things produce these mutations, changes that bring about new species, make lions and tigers arise as two different varieties of the cat family—or make a reptilian thing give rise to something warm-blooded—and doom-bearing. Radium rays, radium scattered in pitchblende deposits, and the cosmic

rays that rain down from unknown outer space, can both do it.

Man, clever beastie, thought up another one—X rays can do it, too. And then, forcing his own end on frantically, he sought the world for radium, concentrated it from immensely dilute ores into terrifically potent little tubes, where it could get in its work a thousand times more effectively. Man built X ray machines by the thousands. Not content with the work of natural radium, he constructs huge atom-cracking machines to make artificial radium.

Each is a source of rays that can—the chance is remote, very remote—bring about the subtle change that will give rise to the something not-quite-human. The chance that such a thing will happen is less than the chance that you will draw thirteen spades in a bridge hand.

People have drawn thirteen spades, though. And no species has ruled Earth so very long without being toppled. Toppled, ironically, by one of its own, slightly changed, offspring. Man's held the stage for about a million years, it seems. He's about due for a—change. And he's asking for it, with all the ingenious devices and concentrations of deadly things he's invented.

Norvell Page, in "But Without Horns," tells the story of the coming of that one who is not quite human—but a little more. So far as we know, it's pure fantasy.

So far as we know. For that man-after-man may be here now, of course—one of the several hundred slightly peculiar children in the country today. Slightly moronic-seeming, perhaps—young apes learn so much more quickly than the immensely superior young of mankind that, to apes, children would seem moronic—or perhaps he's passed that stage already. Perhaps he's one of the "very bright boys" going through high school this year—

But, in any case, you'll find Page's yarn disturbing—and fascinating.

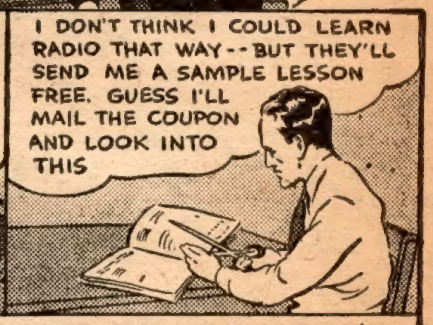
Also coming next month is an unusually fine piece by Nat Schachner—"Master Gerald of Cambray"—the tale of a Latin instructor who, like Martin Padway, landed in the wrong time. But, unlike Padway, landed in a harsher era—the medieval universities. Schachner, author of an authoritative book on these ancient universities, paints a realistic, if not engaging, picture of Paris in the Year of Our Lord Twelve Sixty-three.

And shorter material, of course, to total our usual eighty thousand words of fantasy.

Incidentally, that fact—that one copy of Unknown contains considerably more text than the average two-dollar book—rather surprises most people. You're invited to check it if you don't quite believe that the rather slim-seeming magazine can contain so much.

THE EDITOR.

HOW A FREE LESSON STARTED BILL ON THE WAY TO A GOOD RADIO JOB



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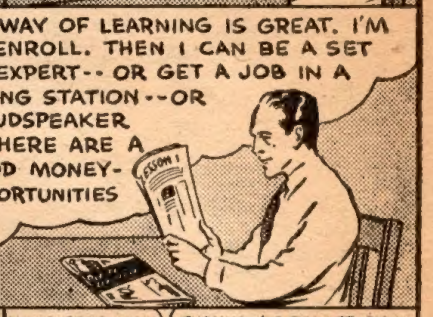

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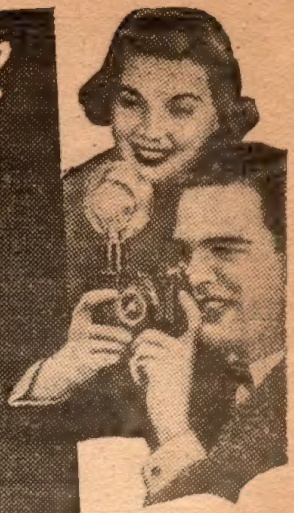

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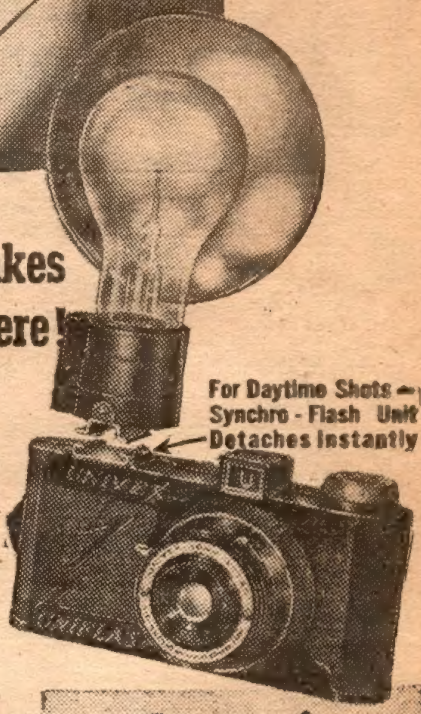

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THE ROARING TRUMPET

by L. SPRAGUE de CAMP and FLETCHER PRATT

Shea started for the land of Irish mythology—and found the Twilight of the Norse Gods!

I.

THERE were four men in the room. All were commonplace as to faces and three were commonplace as to clothes. The fourth wore riding breeches, semi-field boots, and a suède jacket with a tartan lining. The extra-fuzzy polo coat and the sporty tan felt with the green feather which lay on a chair belonged to him also.

But the owner of this remarkable outfit was neither a movie actor nor a rich young idler. He was a psy-

chologist, and his name was Harold Shea. A little taller, a trifle thinner than most people, he would have been handsome if his nose were shorter and his eyes farther apart.

The other three were psychologists like Shea and members of the same group. The oldest, director of the others' activities, was a bushy-haired man named Reed Chalmers. He had just been asking Shea what the devil he meant by coming to work in such theatrical garb.

Shea said: "I'm going to ride a horse when I leave this afternoon. Honest." The last word had a defensive accent.

"Ever ridden a horse?" asked a small and dynamic young man named Vaclav Polacek.

"N-no," replied Shea, "but it's about time I learned." Again the tone was defensive.

The remaining member of the group, Walter Bayard, snorkled. "What you ought to say is that you're going to ride a horse so as to have an excuse for looking like something out of *Esquire*. First it was fencing, then last winter you were smearing the place up with Norwegian patent ski grease, though I know you went skiing just twice."

"So what?" demanded Shea.

Chalmers spoke worriedly. "Aren't you satisfied with your work here?"

"Why shouldn't I be? We do about as we damn please, thanks to old man Garaden's putting that requirement for a psychology institute into his bequest to the hospital. I could use more money. But so could everybody."

"That's not the point," said Chalmers. "These poses of yours point to an inner conflict, a maladjustment with your environment."

Shea grinned. "Call it a little suppressed romanticism. I figured it out for myself long ago. Look. Walt, here, spends his time trying to become Midwestern tennis champ. What good'll it do him? Votsy"—he waved a hand at Vaclav Polacek—"spends hours at home, carving models of ocean liners—another fixation on the distant and romantic. *I* like to dress up. So what?"

"That's all right," Chalmers admitted, "if you don't start taking your romantic imaginings seriously. Oh, well, if you start suffering from depressions, let me know. Let's get down to business now.

"I've told you how I checked my premise, that the world we live in is composed of impressions received through the senses. But there is an infinity of possible worlds, and if the senses can be attuned to receive a different series of impressions, we should infallibly find ourselves living in a different world. That's where I got the second check, here at the hospital, in the examination of dements, mainly paranoiacs. You"—he nodded at Bayard—"set me on the right track with that report on the patient with Korsakov's psychosis.

"The next step should be to translate this theoretical data into experiment; that is, to determine how to transfer from one world into another. Among the dements, the shift is partial and involuntary, with disastrous results to the psyche. When—"

"Just a minute," interrupted Shea. "Do you mean that a complete shift would actually transfer a man's body into one of these other worlds?"

"Very likely, since the body records whatever sensations the mind permits. For complete demonstration it would be necessary to try it, and I don't know that the risk would be worth it. The other world might have such different laws that it would be impossible to return."

"You mean, if the world were that of classical mythology, for instance, the laws would be those of Greek magic instead of modern physics?"

"Precisely. But—"

"How could you work the shift?" interrupted Bayard.

CHALMERS frowned. "I'll get to that, if you give me time. As I see it, the method consists of filling your mind with the fundamental assumptions of the world in question. Now, what are the fundamental assumptions of our world? Obviously, those of scientific logic."

"Such as—" said Shea.

"Oh, the principle of dependence, for instance. 'Any circumstance in which alone a case of the presence of a given phenomenon differs from the case of its absence is casually relevant to that phenomenon.' "

"Ow!" yelled Polacek. "Dr. Chalmers, do you know what that means?"

"Certainly," replied Chalmers, not at all amused.

"Do *you?*" asked Polacek, turning to Shea.

"Sure," grinned Shea, "or if I didn't, I wouldn't admit it."

Polacek complained, "It's almost as bad as Frege's definition of number."

" 'The number of things in a given class—' " began Shea.

"Stop! That thing always drives me nuts!"

" '—is the class of all classes that are similar to the given class.' "

"Hrrrm," remarked Chalmers. "If you gentlemen are through with your joke, I'll go on. If one of these infinite other worlds—which exist in a logical but not in an empirical sense—is governed by magic, you might expect to find a principle like that of dependence invalid, but principles of magic, such as the law of similarity, valid."

"What's the law of similarity?" questioned Bayard sharply.

"The law of similarity may be stated thus: effects resemble causes. It's not valid for us, but primitive peoples firmly believe it. For instance, they think that you can make it rain by pouring water on the ground with appropriate mumbo-jumbo."

"I didn't know you could have fixed principles of magic," commented Shea.

"Certainly," replied Chalmers, unsmiling. "Medicine men don't merely go through hocus-pocus. They believe they are working according to natural laws. In a world where everyone firmly believed in these laws, that is, in one where all minds were attuned to receive the proper impressions, the laws of magic would conceivably work, as one hears of witch doctors' spells working in Africa today. Frazer has worked out many of the magical laws. Another is the law of contagion: that things once in contact continue to interact from a distance after separation.

"As you know, you can build up a self-consistent logic on almost any set of assumptions—"

Bayard, sitting as usual with half-closed eyes, interjected another of his sharp observations: "Isn't there a flaw in the structure there, doctor? It seems to me that your hypothesis renders transference to the future possible. By means of that transference we would then become aware of natural laws not yet discovered at present and, for that matter, of inventions not yet made. But the future naturally won't be ignorant of your method of transference. Therefore, one could return from the future to the present with a whole

list of new inventions. These inventions, launched into the present, would anticipate the future, and by anticipating it, change it."

"Very ingenious," said Chalmers, "but I'm afraid you overlook something. You might indeed secure transference to *a* future; but it would not necessarily be *the* future, the actual future. A mental frame of reference is required. That is, we need a complete set of concepts of the physical world, which concepts condition the impressions received by the mind. The concepts of the actual future will be the product of a large number of factors, now operating in a manner unknown to us. That is—"

"I see." It was the quick-thinking Polacek. "The frame of reference for the actual future is not yet formed, whereas the frames of reference for all past worlds are fixed."

"Precisely. I would go beyond that. Transference to any world exhibiting a fixed pattern is possible, but to such worlds only. That is, one could secure admission to any of H. G. Wells' numerous futures. The mythology of the Iliad should not be impossible. We must merely choose a series of basic assumptions. In the case of the actual future we are ignorant of the assumptions. But—" and he droned on and on.

Harold Shea lay on his bed, smoked and thought. He smoked expensive English cigarettes, not because he liked them especially, but because it was part of his pattern of affectation to smoke something unusual. He thought about Chalmers' lecture.

It would no doubt be dangerous, as Chalmers said. But he was getting unutterably bored with life. Chalmers was able, but dull, and while in theory all four were researchers, in practice the three subordinates merely collected facts and left to the doctor the fun of assembling them and generalizing from them.

Of course, thought Shea, he did get some fun out of his little poses, but they were a poor substitute for real excitements. He liked wearing his new breeches and boots, but riding a horse had been an excruciating experience. It also had none of the imaginary thrill of swinging along in a cavalry charge, which he had half unconsciously promised himself. All he got was the fact that his acquaintances thought him a nut. Let 'em; he didn't care.

But he was too good a psychologist to deceive himself long or completely. He did care. He wanted to make a big impression, but he was one of those unfortunates who adopt a method that produces the effect opposite to the one they want.

Hell, he thought, no use introspecting myself into the dumps. Chalmers says it'll work. The old bore misses fire once in a while, like the time he tried to psychoanalyze the cleaning woman and she thought he was proposing marriage. But that was an error of technique, not of general theory. Chalmers was sound enough on theory, and he had already warned of dangers in the practical application in this case.

Yes. If he said that one could transport oneself to a different place and time by formula, it could be done. The complete escape from—well, from insignificance, he confessed to himself. He would be the Columbus of a new experience in time and space!

Harold Shea got up and began to pace the floor, excited by the trend of his own thoughts. To explore—say the world of the Iliad. Danger, danger; one might not be able to

get back, Chalmers had warned. Especially not, Shea told himself a trifle grimly, if one turned out to be one of those serf soldiers who died by thousands under the gleaming walls of Troy.

Not the Iliad. The Slavic twilight? No; too full of man-eating witches and werewolves. Ireland! That was it—the Ireland of Cuchulinn and Queen Maev. Blood there, too, but what the hell, you can't have adventure without some danger. At least, the dangers were reasonable open-eye stuff you could handle. And the girls of that world—they were something pretty slick by all description.

It is doubtful whether Shea's colleagues noticed in the following days any change in his somewhat irregular and fantastic methods of working. They would hardly have suspected him of dropping Havelock Ellis for the Ulster and Fenian legendary cycles with which he was conditioning his mind for the attempted "trip." If any of them, entering his room suddenly, had come on a list with many erasures, which included a flashlight, a gun, and mercurochrome, they would merely have supposed that Shea intended to make a rather queer sort of camping expedition.

And Shea was too secretive about his intentions to let anyone see the equipment he selected: a Colt .38 revolver with plenty of ammunition, a stainless-steel hunting knife —"They ought to be able to appreciate metal like that," he told himself —a flashlight, a box of matches to give him a reputation as a wonder worker, a notebook, a Gaelic dictionary, and, finally, the boy scout handbook, edition of 1926, as the easiest source of ready reference for one who expected to live in the open air and in primitive society.

Shea went home after a weary day of asking questions of neurotics, and had a good dinner. He put on the almost-new riding clothes and strapped over his polo coat a shoulder pack to hold his kit. He put on the hat with the green feather, and with these preparations made, sat down at his desk. There, on sheets of paper spread before him, were the logical equations, with their little horseshoes, upside-down T's, and identity signs.

His scalp prickled a trifle as he gazed at them for a moment, unseeing. But what the hell! Stand by for adventure and romance! He bent over, giving his whole attention to the formulas, trying not to focus on one spot, but to apprehend the whole:

"If P equals not-Q, Q implies not-P, which is equivalent to saying either P or Q or neither, but not both. *But* if not-P is not implied by not-Q, the counter-implicative form of the proposition—"

There was nothing but six sheets of paper. Just that, lying in two neat rows of three sheets, with perhaps half an inch between them. There should be strips of table showing between them. But there was nothing—nothing.

"The full argument thus consists in an epicheirematic syllogism in Barbara, the major premises of which is *not* the conclusion of an enthymeme, though the minor premise of which may or may not be the conclusion of a non-Aristotelian Sorites—"

The papers were still there, but overlying the picture of those six white rectangles was a whirl of faint spots of color. All the colors of the spectrum were represented, he noted with some detached section at the back of his mind, but there was a strong tendency toward violet.

Round and round they went—round—and round—

"If either P or Q is true or (Q or R) is true then either Q is true or (P or R) is false—"

Round—and round— He could hear nothing, nothing at all. He had no sense of heat or cold, or of the pressure of the chair seat against him. There was nothing but millions of whirling spots of color.

Yes, he could feel temperature now. He was cold. There was sound, too, a distant whistling sound, like that of a wind in a chimney. The spots were fading into a general grayness. There was a sense of pressure, also, on the soles of his feet. He straightened his legs—yes, standing on something. But everything around him was gray—and bitter cold, with a wind whipping the skirts of his coat around him.

He looked down. His feet were there all right—hello, feet, pleased to meet you. But they were fixed in grayish-yellow mud which had squilched up in little ridges around them. The mud belonged to a track, only two feet wide. On both sides of it, gray-green began, the gray-green of dying grass. On the grass large flakes of snow were scattered, dandruffwise. More were coming, visible as dots of darker gray against the background of whirling mist, swooping down long parallel inclines, growing and striking the path with the tiniest *ts*. Now and then one spattered against Shea's face.

He had done it. The formula worked!

II.

"Welcome to Ireland!" Harold Shea murmured to himself, and looked around. The snow was not alone responsible for the grayness. There was also a cold, clinging mist that cut off vision at a hundred yards or so. Ahead of him the track edged leftward around a little mammary of a hill, on whose flank a tree rocked under the melancholy wind. The tree's arms all reached one direction, as though the wind were habitual; its branches bore a few leaves as gray and discouraged as the landscape itself. The tree was the only object visible in that wilderness of mud, grass and fog. Shea stepped toward it and was dumfounded to observe that the serrated leaves bore the indentations of the Northern scrub oak.

But that grows only in the Arctic Circle, he thought, and was bending closer for another look when he heard the *clop-squash* of a horse's hoofs on the muddy track behind him.

He turned. The horse was very small, hardly more than a pony, and shaggy, with a luxuriant tail blowing round its withers. On its back sat a man who might have been tall had he been upright, for his feet nearly touched the ground. But he was hunched before the icy wind driving in behind. From saddle to eyes he was enveloped in a faded blue cloak. A formless slouch hat was pulled tight over his face, yet not so tight as to conceal the fact that he was both full-bearded and gray.

Shea took half a dozen quick steps to the roadside and addressed the man with the phrase he had carefully composed in advance for his first human contact in the world of old Ireland:

"The top of the morning to you, my good man, and would it be far to the nearest hostel?"

He had meant to say more, but paused a trifle uncertainly as the man on the horse lifted his head to reveal a proud, unsmiling face in which the left eye socket was hor-

ribly vacant. Shea smiled weakly, then gathered his courage and plunged on: "It's a rare bitter December you do be having in Ireland."

The stranger looked at him, Shea felt, with much of the same clinical detachment he himself would have given to an interesting case of schizophrenia, and spoke in slow, deep tones: "I have no knowledge of hostels, nor of Ireland; but the month is not December. We are in May, and this is the Fimbulwinter."

A little prickle of horror filled Harold Shea, though the last word was meaningless to him. Faint and far, his ear caught a sound that might be the howling of a dog—or a wolf. As he sought for words there was a flutter of movement. Two big black birds, like oversize crows, slid down the wind past him and came to rest on the dry grass, looked at him for a second or two with bright, intelligent eyes, then took the air again.

"Well, where *am* I?"

"At the wings of the world, by Midgard's border."

"Where in hell is that?"

The deep voice took on an edge of annoyance. "For all things there is a time, a place, and a person. There is none of the three for ill-judged questions and empty jokes." He showed Shea a blue-clad shoulder, clucked to his pony and began to move wearily ahead.

"Hey!" cried Shea. He was feeling good and sore. The wind made his fingers and jaw muscles ache. He was lost in this arctic wasteland, and this old goat was about to trot off and leave him stranded. He leaped forward, planting himself squarely in front of the pony. "What kind of a runaround is this, anyway? When I ask someone a civil question—"

The pony had halted, its muzzle almost touching Shea's coat. The man on the animal's back straightened suddenly so that Shea could see he was very tall indeed, a perfect giant. But before he had time to note anything more he felt himself caught and held with an almost physical force by that single eye. A stab of intensest, burning cold seemed to run through him, *inside his head,* as though his brain had been pierced by an icicle. He felt rather than heard a voice which demanded, "Are you trying to stop *me,* niggeling?"

For his life, Shea could not have moved anything but his lips. "N-no," he stammered. "That is, I just wondered if you could tell me how I could get somewhere where it's warm—"

The single eye held him unblinkingly for a few seconds. Shea felt that it was examining his inmost thoughts. Then the man slumped a trifle so that the brim of his hat shut out the glare and the deep voice was muffled. "I will be tonight at the house of the bonder Sverre, which is the Crossroads of the World. You may follow." The wind whipped a fold of his blue cloak, and as it did so there came, apparently from within the cloak itself, a little swirl of leaves. One clung for a moment to the front of Shea's coat. He caught it with numbed fingers, and saw it was an ash leaf, fresh and tender with the bright green of spring—in the midst of this howling wilderness, where only arctic scrub oak grew!

SHEA LET the pony pass and fell in behind, head down, collar up, hands deep in pockets, squinting against the snowflakes. He was too frozen to think clearly, but he tried. The logical formulas had certainly thrown him into another world. But he hardly needed the word of Old

A weird and tingling chill bored into Shea's mind as the old man's single eye glared down at him—

Whiskers that it was not Ireland. Something must have gone haywire in his calculations. Could he go back and recheck them? No—he had not the slightest idea at present what might have been on those six sheets of paper. He would have to make the best of his situation.

But what situation was it? What world had he tumbled into? A cold, bleak one, inhabited by small, shaggy ponies and grim old blue-clad men with remarkable eyes. It might be the world of Scandinavia in the viking age, or even mythology. Shea knew very little about such a world, except that its No. 1 guy was someone named Odinn, or Woden, or Wotan, and there was another god named Thor who threw a sledge hammer at people he disliked.

Shea's scientific training made him doubt whether he would actually find these gods operating as gods, with more-than-human powers; or, for that matter, whether he would see any fabulous monsters. Still, that stab of cold through his head and that handful of ash leaves needed explaining. Of course, the pain in his head might be an indication of incipient pneumonia, and Old Whiskers might make a habit of carrying ash leaves in his pockets. But still—

The big black birds were keeping up with them. They didn't seem afraid, nor did they seem to mind the ghastly weather.

It was getting darker, though in this landscape of damp blotting paper, Shea could not tell whether the sun had set. The wind pushed at him violently, forcing him to lean into it; the mud on the path was freezing, but not quite gelid. It had collected in yellow gobs on his boots. He could have sworn the boots weighed thirty pounds apiece, and they had taken in water around the seams, adding clammy socks to his discomfort. A clicking sound, like a long roll of castanets, made him wonder until he realized it was caused by his own teeth.

He seemed to have been walking for days, though he knew it could hardly be a matter of hours. Reluctantly he took one hand from his pocket and gazed at his wrist watch. It read 9:56; certainly wrong. When he held the watch to a numbed ear he discovered it had stopped. Neither shaking nor winding could make it start.

He thought of asking his companion the time, but realized that the rider would have no more accurate idea than himself. He thought of asking how much farther they had to go. But he would have to make himself heard over the wind, and the old boy's manner did not encourage questions.

They plodded on. The snow was coming thickly through the murky twilight. Shea could barely make out the figure before him. The path had become the same neutral gray as everything else, and the weather was turning colder. The snowflakes were dry and hard, stinging and bouncing where they struck. Now and then an extra puff of wind would snatch a cloud of them from the moor, whirling it into Shea's face. He would shut his eyes to the impact, and when he opened them find he had blundered off the path and have to scurry after his guide.

Light. He pulled the pack around in front of him and fumbled in it till he felt the icy touch of the flashlight's metal. He pulled it out from under the other articles and pressed the switch button. Nothing happened, nor would shaking, slapping, or repeated snappings of the switch produce any result.

In a few minutes it would be too

dark for him to follow the man on the pony by sight alone. Whether the old boy liked it or not, Shea would have to ask the privilege of holding a corner of his cloak as a guide.

It was just as he reached this determination that something in the gait of the pony conveyed a sense of arrival. A moment more and the little animal was trotting, with Shea stumbling and skidding along the fresh snow behind as he strove to keep pace. The pack weighed tons, and he found himself gasping for breath as though he were running up a forty-five-degree angle instead of on an almost level path.

Then there was a darker patch in the dark-gray universe, and Shea's companion halted the pony, sliding off. A rough-hewn timber door loomed through the storm, and the old man banged against it with his fist. It opened, flinging a flood of yellow light out across the snow. The old man stepped into the gap, his cloak vividly blue in the fresh illumination.

Shea, left behind, croaked a feeble "Hey!" just managing to get his foot in the gap of the closing door. It opened full out and a man in a baggy homespun tunic peered out at him, his face rimmed with drooping whiskers. "Well?"

"May I c-c-come in?"

"Umph," said the man. "Come on, come on. Don't stand there letting the cold in!"

III.

Shea stood in a kind of entry hall, soaking in the delicious warmth. The vestibule was perhaps six feet deep. At its far end a curtain of skins had been parted to permit the passage of the old man who preceded him. The bonder Sverre—Shea supposed that would be his host—pulled them still wider. "Lord, use this as your own house, now and forever," he murmured with the perfunctory hurry of a man repeating a formula like "Pleased to meet you."

The explorer of universes ducked under the skins and into a long hall paneled in dark wood. At one end a fire blazed, apparently in the center of the floor, though bricked round to knee height. Around it were a number of benches and tables. Shea caught a glimpse of walls hung with weapons—a huge sword, nearly as tall as he was, half a dozen small spears or javelins, their delicate steel points catching ruddy highlights from the torches in brackets; a kite-shaped shield with metal overlay in an intricate pattern—

No more than a glimpse. Sverre had taken him by the arm and conducted him through another door, was shouting: "Aud! Hallgerda! This stranger's half frozen. Get the steam room ready. Now, stranger, you come with me."

Down a passage to a smaller room, where the whiskered man ordered him: "Get off those wet clothes. Strange garments you have. I've never seen so many buttons and clasps in all my days. If you're one of the Sons of Muspellheim, I'll give you guesting for the night. But I warn you for tomorrow there be men not far from here who would liefer meet you with a sword than a handclasp." He eyed Shea narrowly a moment. "Be you of Muspellheim?"

Where was Muspellheim and what was it?—Shea wondered; but aloud he fenced, "What makes you think that?"

"Traveling in those light clothes this far north. Those that hunt the red bear"—he made a curious motion of his hand as though tracing the outline of an eyebolt in the air

—"need warm hides as well as stout hearts." Again he gave Shea that curiously intent glance, as though trying to ravel some secret out of him.

Shea asked: "This is May, isn't it? I understand you're pretty far north, but you ought to get over this cold snap soon."

The man Sverre moved his shoulders in a gesture of bafflement. "Mought, and then mought not. Men say this would be the Fimbulwinter. If that's so, there'll be little enough of warm till the roaring trumpet blows and the Sons of the Wolf ride from the East, at the *Time*."

Shea would have put a question of his own, but Sverre had turned away a trifle grumpily. He got rid of his clammy shorts instead, turning to note that Sverre had picked up his wrist watch.

"That's a watch," he offered in a friendly voice.

"A thing of power?" Sverre looked at him again, and then a smile of comprehension distended the wide beard as he slapped his knee. "Of course. Mought have known. You came in with the Wanderer. You're all right. One of those southern warlocks."

From somewhere he produced a blanket and whisked it around Shea's nude form. "This way now," he ordered. Shea followed through a couple of doors to another small room, so full of wood smoke that it made him cough. He started to rub his eyes, then just in time caught at the edge of his blanket. There were two girls standing by the door, neither of them in the least like the Irish colleens he had expected to find. Both were blond, apple-cheeked, and rather beamy.

Sverre introduced them: "This here's my daughter Aud. She's a shield girl; can lick her weight in polar bears." Shea, observing the brawny miss, silently agreed. "And this is Hallgerda. All right, you go on in. The water's ready to pour."

In the center of the small room was a sunken hearth full of fire. On top of the fire had been laid a lot of stones about the size of potatoes. Two wooden buckets full of water sat by the hearth.

The girls went out, closing the door. Shea, with the odd sensation that he had experienced all this at some previous time—"It must be part of the automatic adjustment one's mind makes to the pattern of this world," he told himself—picked up one of the buckets. He threw it rapidly on the fire, then followed it with the other. With a hiss, the room filled with water vapor.

Shea stood it as long as he could, which was about a minute, then groped blindly for the door and gasped out. Instantly a bucketful of ice water hit him in the face. As he stood pawing the air and making strangled noises a second bucketful caught him in the chest. He yelped, managing to choke out, "*Glup* . . . stop . . . that's enough!" Somewhere in the watery world a couple of girls were giggling. It was not till his eyes cleared that he realized it was they who had drenched him, and that he was standing between them without his protecting blanket.

His first impulse was to dash back into the steam room. But one of the pair was holding out a towel which it seemed only courtesy to accept. Sverre was approaching unconcernedly with a mug of something. Well, he thought, if they can take it, I can. He discovered that after the first horrible moment his embarrassment had vanished. He

dried himself calmly while Sverre held out the mug.

"Hot mead," Sverre explained. "Something you don't get down South. Aud, get the stranger's blanket. We don't want him catching cold."

Shea took a gulp of the mead, to discover that it tasted something like ale and something like honey. The sticky sweetness of the stuff caught him in the throat at first, but he was more afraid of losing face before these people than of being sick. Down it went, and after the first gulp it wasn't so bad. He began to feel almost human.

"What's your name, stranger?" inquired Sverre.

Shea thought a minute. These people probably didn't use family names. So he said simply, "Harold."

"Hungh?"

Shea repeated, more distinctly. "Oh," said Sverre. "Harald." He made it rhyme with "dolled."

Dressed except for his boots, Shea took the place on the bench that Sverre indicated. As he waited for food he glanced round the hall. Nearest him was a huge middle-aged man with red hair and beard, whose appearance made Shea's mind leap to Sverre's phrase about "the red bear." His dark-red cloak fell back to show a belt with carved gold work on it. Next to him sat another redhead, more on the sandy order, small-boned and foxy-faced, with quick, shifty eyes. Beyond Foxy-face was a blond young man of about Shea's size and build, with a little golden fuzz on his face.

At the middle of the bench two pillars of black wood rose from floor to ceiling, heavily carved, and so near the table that they almost cut off one seat. It was now occupied by the gray-bearded, one-eyed man Shea had followed in from the road. His floppy hat was on the table before him, and he was half leaning around one of the pillars to talk to another big blond man—a stout chap whose face bore an expression of permanent good nature, overlaid with worry. Leaning against the table at his side was an empty scabbard that could have held a sword as large as the one Shea had noticed on the wall.

The time-traveler's eye, roving along the table, caught and was held by that of the slim young man. The latter nodded, then rose and came round the table, grinning bashfully.

"Would ye like a seat companion?" he asked. "You know how it is, like Havámal says:

'Care eats the heart if you cannot speak
To another all your thought.'"

He half-chanted the lines, accenting the alliteration in a way that made the rhymeless verse curiously attractive. But he was going on: "It would help me a lot with the *Time* coming, to talk to a plain human being. I don't mind saying I'm scared. My name's Thjalfi."

"Mine's Harald," said Shea, pronouncing it as Sverre had done.

"You came with the Wanderer, didn't ye? Are ye one of those outland warlocks?"

It was the second time Shea had been accused of that. "I don't know what a warlock is, honest," said he, "and I didn't come with the Wanderer. I just got lost and followed him here, and ever since I've been trying to find out where I am."

Thjalfi laughed, then took a long drink of mead. As Shea wondered what there was to laugh at, the young man said: "No offense, friend Harald. Only it does seem mighty funny for a man to say he's lost at Crossroads of the World.

Ha, ha, I never did hear the like."

"The where, did you say?"

"Sure, the Crossroads of the World! You must come from seven miles beyond the moon not to know that. Hai! You picked a queer time to come, with all of *Them* here"—he jerked his finger toward the four bearded men. "Well, I'd keep quiet about not having the power, if I was you. Ye know what the Havámál says:

'To the silent and sage does care seldom come
When he goes to a house as guest.'

Ye're likely to be in a jam when the trouble starts if ye don't have protection from one of *Them*, but as long as *They* think ye're a warlock, Uncle Fox will help you out."

He jabbed a finger to indicate the small, sharp-featured man among the four, then went on quickly: "Or are ye a hero? If ye are, I can get Redbeard to take ye into his service when the *Time* comes."

"What time? Tell me what this is all—" began Shea, but at that moment Aud and another girl appeared with wooden platters loaded with food.

"Hai, sis!" called Thjalfi cheerfully, and tried to grab a chop from the platter carried by the second, a girl Shea had not previously seen. The girl kicked him neatly on the shin and set it before the late comer.

The meal consisted of various meats, with beside them a big slab of bread, looking as though it had been cut from a quilt. There was no sign of knife, fork, or any vegetable element. Of course, they would not have table silver, Shea assured himself. He broke off a piece of the bread and bit into it. It was better than it looked. The meat that he picked up rather gingerly was apparently a boiled pork chop, well cooked and well seasoned. But as he was taking the second bite, he noted that the shield girl, Aud, was still standing beside him.

As he looked round Aud made a curtsy and said rapidly: "Lord, with this meal as with all things, your wishes are our law. Is there aught else that you desire?"

Shea hesitated for a moment, realizing it was a formula required by politeness and that he should make some remark praising the food. But he had had a long drink of potent mead on an empty stomach. The normal food habits of an American urged him to action.

"Would it be too much to ask whether you have any vegetables?" he said.

For one brief second both the girl and Thjalfi stared at him. Then both burst into shrieks of laughter, Aud staggering back toward the wall, Thjalfi rolling his head forward on his arms. Shea sat staring, red with embarrassment, the half-eaten chop in his hand. He hardly noticed that the four men at the other side of the table were looking at him till the big red-headed man boomed out:

"Good is the wit when men's children laugh before the Aesir! Now, Thjalfi, you shall tell us what brings this lightness of heart."

Thjalfi, making no effort to control himself, managed to gasp out: "The . . . the warlock Harald wants to eat a turnip!" His renewed burst of laughter was drowned in the roar from Redbeard, who leaned back, bellowing: "Oh, ho, ho, ho, ho! Turnip Harald, ha, ha, ha!" His merriment was like a gale with the other three adding their part, even the blue-cloaked Wanderer.

When they had quieted down a little Shea turned to Thjalfi. "What did I do?" he asked. "After all—"

"Ye named yourself Turnip Harald! I'm afeared ye spoiled your chance of standing under Redbeard's banner at the *Time*. Who'd want a hero that ate turnips? In Asgard we use them to fatten hogs."

"But—"

"Ye didn't know better. Well, now your only chance is Uncle Fox. Ye can thank me for saying ye're a warlock. Besides, he loves a good joke; the only humorist in the lot of them, I always say. But eating turnips—ha, ha, that's the funniest thing I've heard since the giant tried to marry the Hammer Thrower!"

Shea, a trifle angry and now completely mystified, turned to ask explanations. Before he could frame the words there was a pounding at the door. Sverre admitted a tall man, pale blond and beardless, with a proud, stately face and a huge golden horn slung over his back. "There's another of *Them*," whispered Thjalfi. "That's Heimdall. I wonder if all twelve of *Them* are meeting here."

"Who the devil are *They?*"

"*Sh!*"

The four bearded men nodded welcome to the newcomer. He took his place beside the Wanderer with lithe grace, and immediately began to say something to the older man, who nodded in rapt attention. Shea caught a few of the words: "—fire horses, but no use telling you with the Bearer of Bad Tidings present." He nodded contemptuously toward Uncle Fox.

"It is often seen," said the latter, raising his voice a trifle, but addressing the red-bearded man as though continuing a conversation begun before, "that liars tell few lies when those are present who can see the truth."

"Or it may be that I have that to tell which I do not wish to have repeated to our enemies by the Evil Companion," said Heimdall, looking straight at Uncle Fox.

"There are even those," continued the latter evenly, still paying Heimdall no attention, "who, having no character of their own, wish to destroy all character by assassinating the reputations of others."

"Liar and thief!" cried Heimdall angrily, bringing his fist down on the table and almost snarling. Shea saw that his front teeth were, surprisingly, of gold.

"Here," rumbled the large redhead, judicially. "Let there be an allaying of the anger of the Aesir in the presence of mortals."

"Let there also," snapped the small man, "be an allaying of insults in the mouth of—"

"All insults are untrue," said Heimdall. "I state facts."

"Facts! Few are the facts that come from that long wagging chin. Facts like the tale of having nine mothers, or the boast of that horn and the great noise it will make—Beware lest mice nest in it and it fails to give a squeak."

"You will hear my trumpet at the *Time*, Father of Lies. And you will not like the sound."

"Some would say that called for the sword."

"Try it. Here is the blade that will carve your stinking carcass."

"Why, you—" Foxy-face and Heimdall were on their feet and bellowing at each other. Their voices had a volume that made Shea wince. The other three bearded men rose and began shouting also, while above their heads, among the rafters of the hall, the two black birds who had been the Wanderer's companions flew round and round with excited cries.

Just as it looked as though the two

original disputants were certain to fling themselves at each other's throat, the bigger redhead grabbed the smaller one by the shoulders and forced him down. "Sit down!" he thundered. The Wanderer, his sonorous voice full of outraged dignity, shouted: "This is disgraceful! We shall have no respect left. I command you to be quiet, both of you!"

"But—" yelled Heimdall.

The Wanderer silenced him with a gesture. "Nothing you can say will be heard. If either of you speaks to the other before bedtime, he shall have nothing less than my gravest displeasure."

Heimdall subsided and went over to a far corner to sit and glare at Foxy-face, who returned the glare. Thjalfi whispered to the awed Shea: "It's like this every time three or four of *Them* get together. They're supposed to set us a good example, but the first thing ye know they're at it like a gang of drunken berserks."

"I'd still like to know who *They* are," said Shea.

"Do ye mean ye really don't know?" Thjalfi stared at him with eyes full of honest rustic perplexity. "Don't that beat all, now? I wouldn't have believed it if ye hadn't asked for those turnips. Well, the one that was scrapping with Heimdall is Loki. The big red-bearded one next to him is Thor. The old man, the Wanderer, is Odinn, and the fat one is Frey. Have ye got them straight now?"

Shea looked hard at Thjalfi, but there was nothing in the latter's face but the most transparent seriousness. Either he had stepped through the formula into some downright dream, or he was being kidded, or the five were local Scandinavian chieftains who for some reason had named themselves after the gods of the old Norse pantheon. The remaining possibility—that these were actually gods—was too wildly improbable for consideration. Yet, those birds—the glance he had received from Odinn—and he knew that Odinn was always represented as one-eyed—

The big redhead called Thor got up and went over to the pair whom Thjalfi had identified as Odinn and Frey. For a few minutes they muttered, heads together. At the conclusion of the conference Odinn got up, clapped his floppy hat on his head, whirled his blue cloak around him, took a last gulp of mead and strode out the door.

As the door banged to behind him, Loki and Heimdall half rose to their feet. Immediately Thor and Frey jumped up, with the former rumbling: "No more! Save your blows, sons of Asgard, for the *Time*. Or if you must deal buffets, exchange them with me." He lifted a fist the size of a small ham, and both subsided. "It is time for bed, in any case. Come along, Loki. You, too, Thjalfi."

Thjalfi rose reluctantly. "I'll speak a word for ye to Uncle Fox in the morning," he murmured in farewell. "Working for these Aesir is no fun. They're an ornery lot, but I suppose we're better off with 'em than without 'em, what with the *Time* coming. Ye know what Ulf, the poet says:

'Bare is the breast without banner before it
When heroes bear weapons to the wack of the world.'

Good night."

SHEA was not at all sure he wanted to work for Loki as a warlock, whatever that was. There was something sly about the man, uncomfortable. The graceful and forthright Heim-

dall had impressed him more in spite of the latter's lack of a sense of humor, he mused.

A small noise at the door was Sverre, putting his head in for a look around and then vanishing again. Of the buxom young women nothing had been seen since they took up the wooden platters. The house was obviously going to bed, but Shea found himself not in the least sleepy. It could hardly be much after nine o'clock. But in a world without any other artificial light than that of torches people would rise and set with the sun. Shea wondered whether he, too, would come around to that dismal habit. Probably, unless he succeeded in getting back to his own world. That was a rather upsetting thought. But, hell, he had taken the risk with his eyes open, and even if this was not the world he had expected to land in, it was still one in which his twentieth-century appliances should give him certain advantages. It would be time enough to worry when—

"Hai, turnip man," said Heimdell suddenly from his corner. "Fill a couple of mugs and bring them hither, will you?"

Shea felt his temper rise at this dictatorial manner. But whatever or whoever Heimdall was, he looked fully capable of enforcing authority. And though the words were peremptory, the tone of voice was evidently meant for kindness. He obeyed.

"Sit down," said Heimdall. "You have been called Harald. Is that correct?"

"Yes. I was told you are Heimdall."

"Nothing less than the truth. I am also known as the Watcher, the Son of Nine Mothers, the Child of Fury, and the Golden. I prefer the titles."

"Well, look here, Heimdall, what's all this—"

"Children of men use the titles or call me sir," said Heimdall severely and a trifle pompously.

"Sorry, sir."

Heimdall looked down his long nose and condescended a smile that showed the gold teeth. "To me this familiarity is not unpleasant, for I have also been called the Friend of Men. But the Lord of Asgard disapproves."

"You mean Odinn?"

"None other."

"The old guy—pardon me, I mean the elderly one-eyed gentleman?"

"You are a well of knowledge."

"I ran into him out on the moor yesterday and followed him here."

"That is not hidden. I saw you."

"You did? Where were you?"

"Many miles eastaway. I also heard your remarks to him. Lucky you were not to have been struck dead."

Shea almost said, "Aw, don't try to kid me." Just in time he remembered the piercing, icy glance Odinn had given him and held his tongue. It wouldn't do to take chances till he knew more about what chances he was taking, what system of natural laws governed this world into which he had fallen. Heimdall was watching him with a slightly amused smile.

"I also heard you tell Thjalfi that you are no warlock, but you know not what it means. You must be from far. However"—he smiled again at Shea's expression of consternation—"few are sorry for that. I'll keep your secret. A joke on the Master of Deception—ho, ho, ho!"

He drank. "And now, child of an ignorant mother," he went on, "it is yet to be seen that you have knowledge of strange things. I propose that we amuse ourselves with the

game of questions. Each shall ask of the other seven questions, and he who answers best shall be adjudged the winner. Ask, mortal!"

Seven questions. Shea considered a moment how he could make them yield him the most information. "Where has Odinn gone?" he asked finally.

"One," said Heimdall. "He has gone to the gates of hell to summon from her grave a woman centuries dead."

IV.

"Did you say hell, honest?" asked Shea.

"It is not to be doubted."

"Well, well, you don't say so." Shea was covering his own incredulity and confusion, with which mingled the thought that this man—god—individual was more difficult than any psychopathic he had ever questioned. He gathered his mental forces for the next try.

"What is Odinn doing that for?"

"Two," replied Heimdall. "The *Time* is coming, and the Aesir need advice. The Wanderer believes that the spae wife buried at the gates of hell can tell us what we need to know."

The vaguely ominous statements about the *Time* were beginning to get on Shea's nerves. He asked, "What is meant by the statement, 'the *Time* is coming'?"

"Three. Ragnarök, as all men know. All men but you alone, dewy-eyed innocent."

"What's Ragnarök?"

"Four. The end of the world, babe in a man's body."

Shea's temper stirred. He didn't like this elaborate ridicule, and he didn't think it fair of Heimdall to count his last question, which had been merely a request to explain an unfamiliar word in the previous answer. But he had met irritatingly irrelevant replies at the Garaden Institute and managed to keep himself under control.

"When will all this happen?"

"Five. Not men, or gods, or Vanes, or even the dwarfs know, but it will be soon. Already the Fimbulwinter, the winter in summer that precedes Ragnarök, is upon us."

"They all say there's going to be a battle. Who will win?" Shea was proud of himself for that question. It covered both the participants and the result.

"Six. Gods and men were glad to have the answer to that, youngling, since we shall stand together against the giant folk. But for the present there is this to be said: our chances are far from good. There are four weapons of great power among us: Odinn's spear, Gungnir; the Hammer of Thor that is called Mjöllnir; Frey's sword, the magic blade Hundingsbana; and my own good sword which bears the name of Head." He slapped the hilt of the sword that hung by his side. "But some of the giants, we do not know how or who, have stolen both the great Hammer and Frey's sword. Unless they are recovered it may be that gods and men will drink of death together."

Shea realized with a rush of panic that the world whose destruction Heimdall was so calmly discussing was the one in which he, Harold Shea, was physically living. This was certainly the danger against which Chalmers had warned him. He was at the mercy of a system of events he could not escape. It was unfair!

"What can I do to keep from getting caught in the gears?" he demanded, and then, seeing Heimdall look puzzled, "I mean, if the world's going to bust up, how can I keep out of the smash?"

Heimdall's eyebrows went up. "Ragnarök is upon us, that not gods know how to avoid—and you, son of man, think of safety! The answer is nothing. And now this is your seventh question, and it is my turn to ask of you."

"But—"

"Child of Earth, you weary me." He stared straight into Shea's eyes, and once more there was that sensation of an icicle piercing his brain. But Heimdall's voice was smooth. "From which of the nine worlds do you come, strangest of strangers, with garments like to none I have seen?"

Shea thought. The question was a little like, "Have you quit beating your wife?" He asked cautiously, "Which nine worlds?"

Heimdall laughed lightly. "Ho—I thought I was to be the questioner here. But there is the abode of the gods, that is Asgard, and that is one world; and the homes of the giants, that are Jötunheim, Muspellheim, Niflheim, and hell, or five worlds in all. There is Alfheim where live the dwarfs; and Svartaheim and Vanaheim which we do not know well, though it is said the Vanes shall stand with us at the *Time*. Lastly there is Midgard, which is overrun with such worms as you."

Shea yawned. The mead and warmth were beginning to pull up on him. "To tell the truth, I don't come from any of them, but from outside your system of worlds entirely."

"A strange answer is that, yet not so strange but it could be true," said Heimdall, thoughtfully. "For I can see the nine worlds from where I sit and nowhere such a person as yourself. Say nothing of this to the other Aesir, and above all to the Wanderer. He would take it ill to hear there was a world in which he held no power. Now I will ask my second question. What men or gods rule this world of yours?"

Shea found himself yawning again. He was too tired for explanations and flipped off his answer. "Well, some say one class rule and some say another, but the real rulers are called traffic cops. They pinch you—"

"Are they then some form of crab fish?"

"No. They pinch you for moving too fast, whereas a crab pinches you for moving too slowly."

"Still they are sea gods, I perceive, like my brother Aegir. What is their power?"

Shea fought a losing battle against another yawn. "I'm sorry I seem to be sleepy," he said. "Aren't you going to bed soon, Golden?"

"Me? Ho, ho! Seldom has such ignorance been seen at the Crossroads of the World. I am the Watcher of the Gods, and never sleep. Sleepless One is, indeed, another of my titles. But it is to be seen that it is otherwise with you, youngling, and since I have won the game of questions you may go to bed."

An angry retort rose to Shea's lips at this calm assumption of victory, but he remembered that icy glare in time. Heimdall, however, seemed able to read his mind. "What! You would argue with me? Off to bed—and remember our little plot against the Bringer of Discord. Henceforth you are Turnip Harald, the bold and crafty warlock."

Shea risked just one more question. "What is a warlock, please, sir?"

"Ho, ho! Child from another world, your ignorance is higher than a mountain and deeper than a well. A warlock is a wizard, an enchanter,

a weaver of spells, a raiser of spirits. Good night, Turnip Harald."

THE BEDROOM, which Sverre had indicated as they left the bath for the hall, proved to have a sliding door. Shea found it no bigger than a Pullman section and utterly without ventilation. The bed was straw-stuffed and jabbed him. He could not find comfort. After an hour or so of tossing, he had the experience, not uncommon on the heels of a day of excitements, of finding himself more wide-awake than in the beginning.

For a time his thoughts floated aimlessly; then he told himself that, since this was an experiment, he might as well spend the sleepless hours trying to assemble results. What were they?

Well, firstly, that there had been an error either in the equations or his use of them, and he had been pitched into a world of Scandinavian mythology—or else Scandinavian history. He was almost prepared to accept the former view. These people talked with great conviction about their Ragnarök. He was enough of a psychologist to recognize their utter sincerity. And that icy stare he had felt from Odinn and then Heimdall was something, so far as he knew, outside ordinary human experience. It might be a form of hypnosis, but he doubted whether the technique, or even the idea of hypnotism, would be known to ancient viking chiefs. No, there was something definitely more than human about them.

Yet they had human enough attributes as well. It ought not to be beyond the powers of an experimental psychologist to guide his conduct by analyzing them a little and making use of the results. Odinn? Well, he was off to the gates of hell, whither Shea had no desire to follow him. Not much to be made of him, anyway, save a sense of authority. What about Loki? A devastatingly sharp tongue that indicated a keen mind at work. Also a certain amount of malice. Uncle Fox, Thjalfi had called him, and said he was fond of jokes. Shea told himself he would not be surprised to find the jokes were often of a painful order. Working for him might be difficult, but Shea smiled to himself as he thought how he could surprise the god with so simple an object as a match.

Frey he had hardly noticed, Thor apparently was no more than a big, good-natured bruiser, and Thjalfi, the kind of rustic one would find in any country town, quoting Eddic lays instead of the Bible. Heimdall, however, was a more complex character, certainly lacking in Loki's sense of humor, but also in the malice that was the basis of that humor. And he quite evidently felt he had a position of dignity to maintain with relation to the common herd—as witness his insistence on titles. But equally evidently he was prepared to accept the responsibilities of that position, throw himself heart and soul and with quite a good mind into the right side of the scales—as Loki was not. Perhaps that was why he hated Loki. And Heimdall, underneath the shell of dignity, evidently had a streak of genuine kindness. One felt one could count on him—and deciding he liked Heimdall the best of the lot, Shea turned over and went to sleep.

V.

SHEA WOKE with a set of fur-bearing teeth and a headache that resembled the establishment of a drop-forging plant inside his brain—

whether from the mead or the effect of those two piercing glances he had received from Heimdall and Odinn he could not tell. It was severe enough to stir him to a morning-after resolution to avoid all three in the future.

When the panel of his bedroom slid back he could hear voices from the hall. Thor, Loki, and Thjalfi were at breakfast as he came in, tearing away with knives and fingers at steaks the size of unabridged dictionaries. The foxy-faced Loki greeted him cheerfully: "Hail, hero of the turnip fields! Will your lordship do us the honor of breakfasting with us?"

He shoved a wooden platter with a hunk of meat on it toward Shea and passed along one of a collection of filled mugs. Shea's mouth was dry, but he almost gagged when a pull at the mug showed it contained beer and sour beer at that.

Loki laughed. "Ridiculous it is," he said, "to see the children of men, who have no fixed customs, grow uneasy when customs about them change. Harald of the Turnips, I am told you are a notable warlock."

Shea looked at his plate. "I know one or two tricks," he admitted.

"It was only to be expected that a hero of such unusual powers would be modest. Now there is this to be said: a man fares ill at Ragnarök unless he have his place. Would you be one of my band at the *Time?*"

Shea gulped. He was still unconvinced about this story of a battle and the end of the world, but he might as well ride with the current till he could master it. "Yes, sir, and thank you."

"The worm consents to ride on the eagle's wings. Thank *you*, most gracious worm. Then I will tell you what you must do; you must go with us to Jötunheim, and that will be a hard journey."

Shea remembered his conversation with Heimdall the night before. "Isn't that where some of the giants live?"

"The frost giants to be exact. That lying Sleepless One claims to have heard Thor's hammer humming somewhere in their castle; and for all of us it will be well to find that weapon. But we shall need whatever we possess of strength and magic in the task—unless, Lord Turnip Eater, you think you can recover it without our help."

Shea gulped again. Should he go with them? He had come looking for adventure, but enough was enough. "What is adventure?" he remembered reading somewhere, with the answer, "Somebody else having a hell of a tough time a thousand miles away." Only—

He awoke from his brown study at a touch on his arm. Thjalfi had come round the table and was saying in a low voice:

"Look. My sister Röskva is staying here at the Crossroads, because the giant killers don't think Jötunheim would be any place for a woman. That leaves me all alone with these Aesir and an awful lot of giants. I'd be mighty obliged if ye could see your way to keep me company."

"I'll do it," said Shea aloud and then realized that his impulsiveness had let him in for something. If Loki and Thor were not sure they could recover the hammer without help, it was likely to be an enterprise of some difficulty. Still, neither Aesir nor giants knew about matches —or the revolver. They would do for magic till something better came along.

"I've already spoken to the Lord of the Goat Chariot," Thjalfi was

saying. "He'd be glad to have ye come, but he says ye mustn't disgrace him by asking to eat turnips. Ye'd best do something about those clothes. They're more than light for this climate and Sverre bonder will lend you some others."

Sverre was glad to take the inadequate polo coat and riding breeches as security for the loan of some baggy Norse garments, and Shea, newly dressed in accordance with his surroundings, went outside. A low, cheerless sun shone on the blinding white of new snow. As the biting cold nipped his nose Shea was thankful for the yards of coarse wool in which he was swathed.

THE GOAT CHARIOT was waiting. It was as big as a Conestoga wagon, notwithstanding that there were only two wheels. A line of incised Runic letters was etched in black around the gold rim; the body was boldly painted red and gold. But the goats constituted the most remarkable feature. One was black, the other white, and they were as big as horses.

"This here's Tooth Gnasher," said Thjalfi, indicating the nigh goat, "and that there's Tooth Gritter," waving at the off goat, the black one. "Say, friend Harald, I'd be mighty obliged if ye'd help me tote the stuff out."

Shea, ignorant of what the "stuff" was, followed Thjalfi into the bonder's house, where the latter pointed to a big oak chest. This, he explained, held the Aesir's belongings. Thjalfi hoisted one end by its bronze handle. Shea took hold of the other, expecting it to come up easily. The chest did not move. He looked at Thjalfi, but the latter merely stood, holding his end off the floor without apparent effort. So Shea took his handle in both hands and gave a mighty heave. He got his end up, but the thing seemed packed with ingots of lead. The pair went through the door, Thjalfi leading, Shea staggering and straining along in the rear. He almost yelled to Thjalfi to hurry and ease the horrible strain on his arms, but this would involve so much loss of face that he stuck it out. When they reached the chariot Shea dropped his end into the snow and almost collapsed across the chest. The icy air hurt his lungs as he drew great gasps of breath.

"All right," said Thjalfi calmly, "you catch hold here, and we'll shove her aboard." Shea forced his unwilling body to obey. They manhandled one end of the chest onto the tail of the chariot and somehow got the whole thing aboard. Shea was uncomfortably aware that Thjalfi had done three quarters of the work, but the rustic seemed not to notice.

With the load in, Shea leaned against one of the shafts, waiting for his heart to slow down and for the aches in his arms and chest to subside. "Now it is to be seen," said a voice, "that Thjalfi has persuaded another mortal to share his labors. Convenient is this for Thjalfi."

It was the foxy-faced Loki, with the usual note of mockery in his voice. Once more Shea's temper began to rise. Thjalfi was all right—but it *did* look as though he had talked Shea into coming along for the dirty work. If— Whoa! Shea suddenly remembered Loki's title—"Bringer of Discord," and Thjalfi's warning about his jokes. Uncle Fox would doubtless think it very funny to get the two mortals into a quarrel, and for the sake of his own credit he didn't dare let the god succeed.

Just then came a tug at his cloak. He whirled round; Tooth Gritter had seized the lower edge of the garment in his teeth and was trying to drag

it off him. "Hey!" cried Shea, and dragged back. The giant goat shook its head and held on while Loki stood with hands on hips, laughing a deep, rich belly laugh. He made not the slightest move to help Shea. Thjalfi came running round and added his strength to Shea's. The cloak came loose with a rip; the two mortals tumbled backward. Tooth Gritter calmly munched the fragment he had torn from the cloak and swallowed it.

Shea got up scowling and faced a Loki purple with amusement. "Say, you," he began belligerently, "what the hell's so damn funny—" At that instant Thjalfi seized him from behind and whirled him away as though he were a child. "Shut up, ye nitwit!" he flung into Shea's ear. "Don't ye know he could burn ye to a cinder just by looking at ye?"

"But—"

"But nothing! Them's gods! No matter what they do ye dassn't say boo, or they'll do something worse. That's how things be!"

"O. K.," grumbled Shea, reflecting with the back of his mind that rustics the world over were a little too ready to accept "that's how things be," and that when the opportunity came he would get back some of his own from Loki.

"Ye want to be careful around them goats," continued Thjalfi. "They're mean, and they eat most anything. I remember a funny thing as happened a fortnight back. We found five men that had frozen to death on the moor. I says we ought to take them in so their folks could give 'em burial. Thor says all right, take 'em in. When we got to the house we was going to stay at, the bonder didn't see as how there was any point in bringing 'em inside, 'cause when they got thawed out, they'd get kind of strong. So we stacked 'em in the yard, like firewood. Next morning, would ye believe it, those goats had gotten at 'em and et 'em up. Everything but their buckles!" Thjalfi chuckled to himself.

As Shea was digesting this example of Norse humor, there came a shout of "Come on, mortals!" from Thor, who had climbed into the chariot. He clucked to the goats, who leaned forward. The chariot wheels screeched and turned.

"Hurry!" cried Thjalfi and ran for the chariot. He had reached it and jumped aboard with a single huge bound before Shea even started. The latter ran behind the now rapidly moving vehicle and tried to hoist himself up. His fingers, again numbed with cold, slipped, and he went sprawling on his face in the snow. He heard Loki's infuriating laugh. As he pulled himself to his feet he remembered bitterly that he had made this "journey" to escape the feeling of insignificance and maladjustment that his former life had given him.

There was nothing to do but run after the chariot again. Thjalfi pulled him over the tail and slapped the snow from his clothes. "Next time," he advised, "ye better get a good grip before ye try to jump. Ye know what it says in Havámal:

> 'It is better to live than to lie a corpse;
> The quick man catches the cart.' "

Thor, at the front of the chariot, said something to the goats. They broke from a trot to a gallop. Shea, clutching the side of the vehicle, became aware that it had no springs. He found he could take the jolting best by flexing his legs and yielding to the jerks.

Loki leaned toward him, grinning. "Hai, Turnip Harald! Let us be merry!" Shea smiled uncertainly. Manner and voice were friendly, but

might conceal some new malicious trick. Uncle Fox continued airily: "Be merry while you can. These hill giants are uncertain of humor where we go. He, he, I remember a warlock named Birger. He put a spell on one of the hill giants so he married a goat instead of a girl. The giant cut Birger open, tied one end of his entrails to a tree, and chased him around it. He, he!"

The anecdote was not appetizing and the chariot was bounding on at the same furious pace, throwing its passengers into the air every time it hit a bump. Up—down—bang—up—down—bang. Shea began to regret his breakfast.

Thjalfi said: "Ye look poorly, friend Harald; sort of goose-green. Shall I get something to eat?"

Shea had been fighting his stomach in desperate dread of losing further prestige by being publicly seasick. But the word "eat" ended the battle. He leaned far over the side of the chariot.

Loki laughed. Thor turned at the sound, and drowned Loki's laughter in a roar of his own. "Haw, haw, haw! If you foul up my chariot, Turnip Harald, I'll make you clean it." There was a kind of good-natured contempt in the tone, more galling than Uncle Fox's amusement.

Shea's stomach finally ceased its convulsions and he sat down on the chest, wishing he were dead. Perhaps it was the discomfort of the seat, but he soon stood up again, forcing himself to grin. "I'll be all right now. I'm just not used to such a pace."

Thor turned his head again and rumbled. "You think this fast, springling? You have in no wise any experience of speed. Watch." He whistled to the goats, who stretched their heads forward and really opened out. The chariot seemed to spend most of the time in the air; at intervals, it would hit a ridge in the road with a thunderous bang and then take off again. Shea clung for dear life to the side, estimating their speed at something between sixty and seventy miles an hour. This is not much in a modern automobile on a concrete road, but something quite different in a two-wheeled springless cart on a rutted track.

"Wow!" yelled Thor, carried away by his own enjoyment of this activity. "Wow! Hang on; here's a curve!" Instead of slackening speed the goats fairly leaped, banking inward on the turn. The chariot lurched in the opposite direction. Shea clung with eyes closed and one arm over the side. "Yoooeee!" bellowed Thor.

It went on for ten minutes more before Thjalfi suggested lunch. Shea found himself actually hungry again. But his appetite quailed at the sight of some slabs that looked like scorched leather.

"*Ulp*—what's that?"

"Smoked salmon," said Thjalfi. "Ye put one end in your mouth, like this. Then ye bite. Then ye swallow. Ye have sense enough to swallow, I suppose?"

Shea tried it. He was amazed that any fish could be so tough. But as he gnawed he became aware of a delicious flavor. When I get back, he thought, I must look up some of this stuff. Rather, *if* I get back.

VI.

THE TEMPERATURE rose during the afternoon, and toward evening the wheels were throwing out fans of slush. Thor roared "Whoa!" and the goats stopped. They were in a hollow between low hills, gray save where the snow had melted to show dark patches of grass. In the hollow

itself a few discouraged-looking spruces showed black in the twilight.

"Here we camp," said Thor. "Goat steak would be our feasting had we but fire."

"What does he mean?" Shea whispered to Thjalfi.

"It's one of the Thunderer's magic tricks. He slaughters Tooth Gnasher or Tooth Gritter and we can eat all but the hide and bones. He magics them back to life."

Loki was saying to Thor: "Uncertain is it, Enemy of the Worm, whether my fire spell will be effective here. In this hill-giant land there are spells against spells. Your lightning flash?"

"It can shiver and slay but not kindle in this damp," growled Thor. "You have a new warlock there. Why not make him work?"

Shea had been feeling for his matches. They were there and dry. This was his chance. "That'll be easy," he said lightly. "I can make your fire as easy as snapping my fingers. Honest."

Thor glared at him with a suspicion Shea could not but admit as natural. "Few are the weaklings equal to any works," he said heavily. "For my part I always hold that strength and courage are the first requirements of a man. But I will not gainsay that occasionally my brothers feel otherwise, and it may be that you can do as you say."

"There is also cleverness, Wielder of Mjöllnir," said Loki. "Even your hammer blows would be worthless if you did not know where to strike; and it may be that this outlander can show us some new thing. Now I propose a contest, we two and the warlock. The first of us to make the fire light shall have a blow at either of the others."

"Hey!" said Shea. "If Thor takes a swat at me, you'll have to get a new warlock."

"That will not be difficult." Loki grinned and rubbed his hands together, and though Shea decided the sly god would find something funny about his mother's funeral, for once he was not caught. He grinned back —and thought he detected a flicker of approval in Uncle Fox's eyes.

Shea and Thjalfi tramped through the slush to the clump of spruces. As he pulled out his supposedly rust-proof knife, Shea was dismayed to observe that the blade had developed a number of dull-red freckles; but he worked manfully hacking down a number of trees and branches. They were piled on a spot from which the snow had disappeared, although the ground was still sopping.

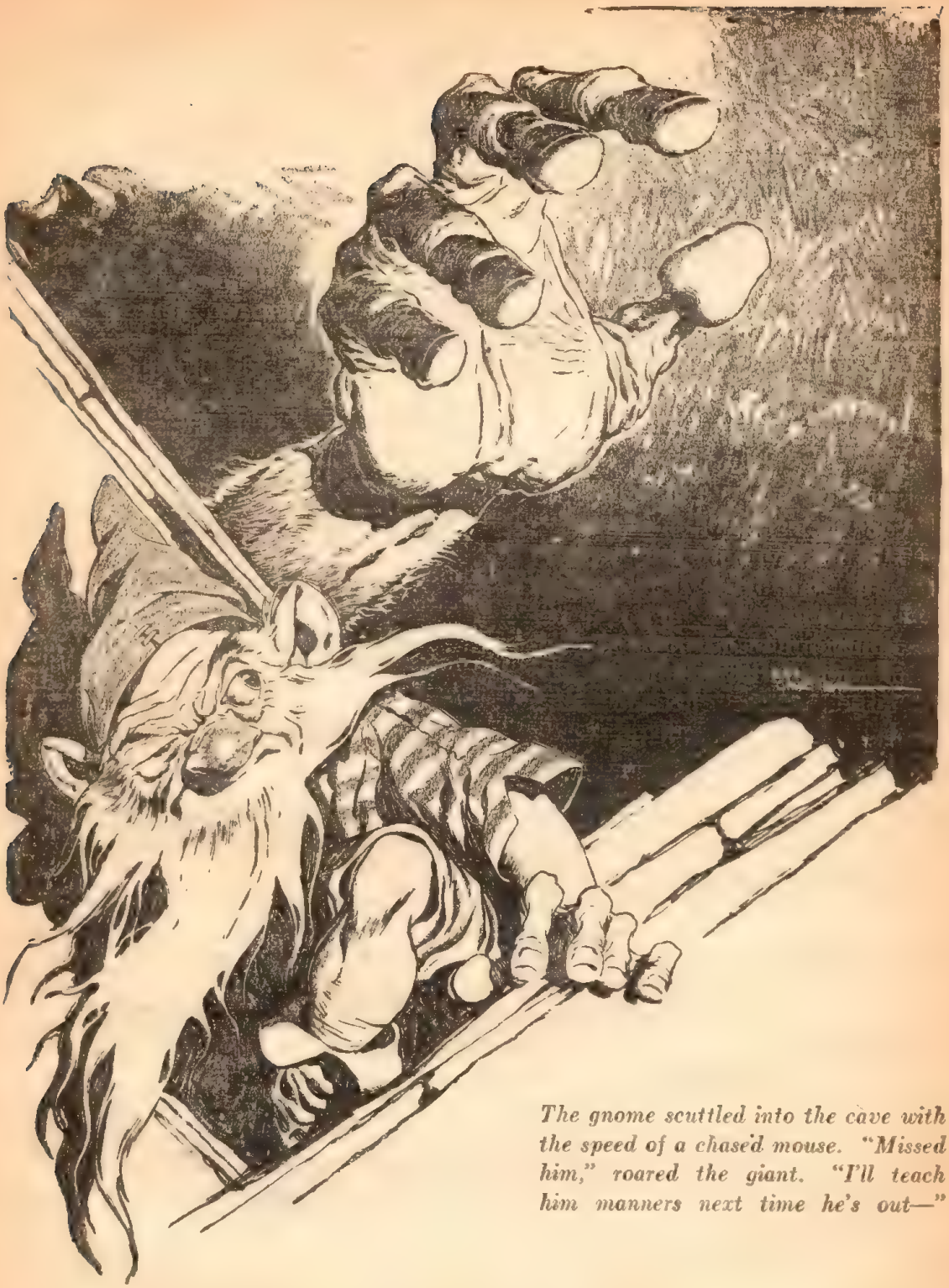
"Who's going to try first?" asked Shea.

"Don't be more foolish than ye have to," murmured Thjalfi. "Redbeard, of course."

Thor walked up to the pile of brush and extended his hands. There was a blue glow of corona discharge around them, and a piercing crack as bright electric sparks leaped from his fingertips to the wood. The brush stirred a little and a few puffs of water vapor rose from it. Thor frowned in concentration, again the sparks crackled, but no fire resulted.

"Too damp is the wood," growled Thor. "Now you shall make the attempt, Sly One."

Loki extended his hands and muttered something too low for Shea to hear. A rosy-violet glow shone from his hands and danced among the brush. In the twilight the strange illumination lit up Loki's sandy red goatee, high cheekbones, and slanting brows with startling effect. His



The gnome scuttled into the cave with the speed of a chased mouse. "Missed him," roared the giant. "I'll teach him manners next time he's out—"

lips moved almost silently. The spruce steamed gently, but did not light.

Loki stepped back. The magenta glow died out. "A night's work," said he. "Let us see what our warlock can do."

SHEA had been assembling a few small twigs, rubbing them to dry-

ness on his clothes and arranging them like an Indian tepee. They were still dampish, but he supposed spruce would contain enough resin to light.

"Now," he said with a trace of swagger. "Let everybody watch. This is strong magic."

He felt around in the little container that held his matches until he found some of the nonsafety kitchen type. His three companions held their breaths as he took out a match and struck it against the box.

Nothing happened.

He tried again. Still no result. He threw the match away and essayed another, again without success. He tried another, and another, and another. He tried two at once. He put away the kitchen matches and got out a box of safety matches. The result was no better. There was no visible reason. The matches simply would not light.

He stood up. "I'm sorry," he said, "but something has gone wrong. If you'll just wait a minute, I'll look it up in my book of magic formulas."

There was just enough light left to read by. Shea got out his Boy Scout Manual. Surely it would tell him what to do—if not with failing matches, at least it would instruct him in the art of rubbing sticks.

He opened it at random and peered, blinked his eyes, shook his head and peered again. The light was good enough. But the black marks on the page, which presumably were printed sentences, were utterly meaningless. A few letters looked vaguely familiar, but he could make nothing of the words. He leafed rapidly through the book; it was the same senseless jumble of hen tracks everywhere. Even the few diagrams meant nothing without the text.

Harold Shea stood with his mouth open and not the faintest idea of what to do next. "Well," rumbled Thor, "where is our warlock fire?"

In the background Loki tittered. "He perhaps prefers to eat his turnips uncooked."

"I . . . I'm sorry, sir," babbled Shea. "I'm afraid it won't work."

Thor lifted his massive fist. "It is time," he said, "to put an end to this lying and feeble child of man who raises our hopes and then condemns us to a dinner of cold salmon."

"No, Slayer of Giants," said Loki. "Hold your hand. He furnishes us something to laugh at, which is always good in this melancholy country. I may be able to use him where we are going."

Thor slowly lowered his arm. "Yours be the responsibility. I am not unfriendly to the children of men; but for liars I have no sympathy. What I say I can do, that will I do."

Thjalfi spoke. "If ye please, sir, there's a dark something up yonder." He pointed toward the head of the valley. "Maybe we can find shelter."

Thor growled an assent; they got back into the chariot and drove up toward the dark mass. Shea was silent, with the blackest of thoughts. He would leave his position as researcher at the Garaden Institute to go after adventure with a capital A, would he? And as an escape from a position where he felt himself inferior and inclosed. Well, he told himself bitterly, he had landed in another still more inclosed and inferior. Yet why was it his preparations had so utterly failed? There was no reason for the matches' not lighting or the books turning into gibberish—or for that matter the failure of the flashlight on the night before.

Thjalfi was whispering to him. "By

the beard of Odinn, I'm ashamed of you, friend Harald. Why did ye promise a fire if ye couldn't make it?"

"I thought I could, honest," said Shea morosely.

"Well, maybe so. Ye certainly rubbed the Thunderer the wrong way. Ye'd best be grateful to Uncle Fox. He saved your life for you. He ain't as bad as some people think, I always say. Usually helps you out in a real pinch."

THE DARK something grew into the form of an oddly shaped house as they approached. The top was wounded, the near end completely open. When they went in Shea found to his surprise that the floor was of some linoleumlike material, as were the curving walls and low-arched roof. There seemed only a single broad low room, without furniture or lights. At the far end they could dimly make out five hallways, circular in cross section, leading they knew not where. Nobody cared to explore. Thjalfi and Shea dragged down the heavy chest and fished out blankets. For supper the four glumly chewed pieces of smoked salmon. Thor's eyebrows worked in a manner that showed he was trying to control what he evidently felt as justifiable anger.

Finally Loki said: "It is in my mind that our fireless warlock has not heard the story of your fishing, son of Jörd."

"Oh," said Thor, "that story is not unknown. But it is good that men should hear it and learn from it. Let me think—"

"Odinn preserve us!" murmured Thjalfi in Shea's ear. "I've only heard this a million times."

Thor rumbled: "I was guesting with the giant Hymir. We rowed far out in the blue sea. I baited my hook with a whole ox head, for the fish I fish are worthy a man's strength. At the first strike I knew I had the greatest fish of all: to wit, the Midgard Serpent, for his strength was so great. Three whales could not have pulled so hard. For nine hours I played the serpent, thrashing to and fro, before I pulled him in. When his head came over the gunwale, he sprayed venom in futile wrath; he ate holes in my clothes. His eyes were as great as shields, and his teeth *that* long." Thor held up his hands in the gloom to show the length of the teeth. "I pulled and the serpent pulled again. I was braced with my belt of strength; my feet nearly went through the bottom of the boat.

"I had all but landed the monster, when—I speak no untruth—that fool Hymir got scared and cut the line! The biggest thing any fisherman ever caught, and it escaped!" He finished on a mournful note: "I gave Hymir a thumping he will not soon forget. But it did not give me the trophy I wanted to hang on the walls of Thrudvang!"

Thjalfi leaned toward Shea, half singing in his ear:

" 'A man shall not boast of the fish that fled
Or the bear he failed to flay;
Bigger they be than those borne back
To hang their heads in the hall.'

At least that's what Atli's Drapar says."

Loki chuckled; he had caught the words. "True, youngling. Had any but our friend and great protector told such a tale, I would doubt it."

"Doubt me?" rumbled Thor. "How would you like one of my buffets?" He drew back his arm, and as Loki ducked, laughed a huge good-natured laugh. "Two things gods and mortals alike doubt—tales of fishing and the virtue of women."

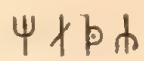
He lay back among the blankets, took two deep breaths and seemed to be snoring instantly. Loki and Thjalfi also lapsed into silence. Shea, unable to sleep, let his mind go over and over the day's doings. He had shown up pretty badly, he realized. It annoyed him, for he was beginning to like these people, even the unapproachable and tempestuous Thor. The big fellow was all right, he told himself, someone you could depend on right up to the hilt, especially in any crisis that required straightforward courage. He would see right and wrong divided by a line of absolute sharpness, chalk on one side, coal dust on the other; and became annoyed only when others did not have the same simple strength as himself.

About Loki, Shea was not quite so sure. Uncle Fox had saved his life, all right, but Shea could not rid himself of the uneasy conviction that there had been a touch of self-interest about the act. Loki expected to make some use of him, and not entirely as a butt of jokes, either. That keen mind had doubtless noted the unfamiliar gear Shea had brought from the twentieth century and was speculating on its use.

But why had those gadgets failed to work? Why had he been unable to read simple English print?

Was it English? Shea tried to visualize his name in written form. It was easy enough, and showed him that the transference had not made him illiterate. But wait a minute, what was he visualizing? He concentrated on the row of letters in his mind's eye. What he saw was:

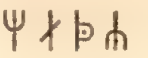
These letters spelled Harold Bryan Shea to him. At the same time he realized they weren't the letters of the Latin alphabet. He tried some more visualizations. "Man" came out as:



Something was wrong. "Man," he vaguely remembered, ought not to have four letters.

Then, gradually, he realized what had happened. Chalmers had been right and more than right. His mind had been filled with the fundamental assumptions of this new world. When he transferred from his safe, Midwestern institute to this howling wilderness, he had automatically changed languages. If it were otherwise, if the shift were partial, he would be a dement—insane. But the shift was complete. He was speaking and understanding old Norse, touching old Norse gods and eating old Norse food. No wonder he had had no difficulty making himself understood!

But as an inevitable corollary, his knowledge of English had vanished completely. When he thought of the written form of "man" he could form no concept but that of the four runic characters:



He couldn't even imagine what the word would look like with the runes put into other characters. And he had failed to read his Boy Scout handbook.

Naturally his gadgets had failed to work. He was in a world not governed by the laws of twentieth-century physics or chemistry. It had a mental pattern which left no room for matches or flashlights, or non-rusting steel. These things were simply inconceivable to anyone around

him. Therefore they did not exist save as curiously shaped objects of no value.

Well, anyway, he thought to himself drowsily, at least I won't have to worry about the figure I cut in front of these guys again. I've fallen so low that nothing I could do would make me a bigger fool. Oh, what the hell—

VII.

SHEA AWOKE before dawn, shivering. The temperature was still above freezing, but a wind had come up, and the gray landscape was curtained with driving rain. He yawned and sat up with his blanket round him like an Indian. The others were still asleep and he stared out for a moment, trying to recover the thread of last night's thoughts.

This world he was in—perhaps permanently—was governed by laws of its own. What were those laws? There was one piece of equipment of which the transference had not robbed him; his modern mind, habituated to studying and analyzing the general rules guiding individual events. He ought to be able to reason out the rules governing this existence and to use them—something which, he assured himself, the rustic Thjalfi would never think of doing. So far the only rules he had noticed were that the gods had powers of highly unusual character. But there must be general laws underlying even these—

Thor's snores died away into a gasping rattle. The red-bearded god rubbed his eyes, sat up, and spat.

"Up, all Aesir's men!" he said. "Ah, Harald of the Turnips, you are already awake. Cold salmon will be our breakfast again since your fire magic failed." Then, as he saw Shea stiffen. "Nay, take it not unkindly. We Aesir are not unkind to mortals, and I've seen more unpromising objects than you turn out all right. Make a man of you yet, youngling. Just watch me and imitate what I do." He yawned and the yawn spread into a bristling grin.

The others bestirred themselves and Thjalfi got out some smoked salmon. However good the stuff was, Shea found the third successive meal of it a little too much.

They were just beginning to gnaw when there was a heavy tramp outside. Through the rain loomed a gray shape whose outline made Shea's scalp tingle. It was mannish, but at least ten feet tall, with massive columnar legs. It was a giant.

The giant stooped and looked into the travelers' refuge. Shea, his heart beating madly, backed up against the curving wall, his hand feeling for his hunting knife. The face that looked in was huge, with bloodshot gray eyes and a scraggly iron-gray beard, and its expression was not encouraging.

"Ungh," snarled the giant, showing yellow snags of teeth. His voice was a couple of octaves beneath the lowest human bass. " 'Scuse me, gents, but I been looking for my glove. How 'bout having a little breakfast together, huh?"

Shea, Thjalfi and Loki all looked at Thor. The Red God stood with feet wide apart, surveying the giant for some minutes. Then he said, "Good is guesting on a journey. We offer some smoked salmon. But what have you?"

"The name's Skrymir, buddy. I got some bread and dried dragon meat. Say, ain't you Thor Odinnsson, the hammer thrower?"

"That is not incorrect."

"Boy, oh boy, ain't that something?" The giant made a horrible face that was probably intended for a friendly grin. He reached around for a bag that hung at his back and,

sitting down in front of the shelter, opened it. Shea got a better view of him, though not one that inspired a more favorable impression. The monster's long gray hair was done up in a topknot with bone skewers stuck through it. He was dressed entirely in furs, of which the cloak must have come from the grandfather of all the bears, though it was none too large for him.

Skrymir extracted from his bag a slab of Norse bread the size of a young mattress with several hunks of leathery-looking gray meat. These he slapped down in front of the travelers. "All right, youse guys, help yourselves," he rumbled. "Let's see some of that salmon, huh?"

Thjalfi mutely handed over a piece of the salmon on which the giant set to work, masticating noisily. He drooled, now and then wiping his face with the back of his huge paw, and getting himself well smeared with salmon grease.

Shea found he had to break up his portion of the bread with his knife-handle before he could manage it, so hard was the material. The dragon meat was a little easier, but still required some hard chewing, and his jaw muscles were sore from the beating they had taken in the last twenty-four hours. The dragon meat had a pungent, garlicky flavor that he didn't care for.

As Shea gnawed he saw a louse the size of a cockroach crawl out from the upper edge of one of Skrymir's black fur leggings, amble around a bit in the jungle of hair below the giant's knee, and stroll back into its sanctuary. Shea almost gagged; was only saved from doing so by the thought of what the others would think, forgetting his resolution not to care. His appetite tapered off, though presently it returned. After what he had been through lately, it would take more than a single louse to spoil his interest in food for any length of time. What the hell?

Loki, grinning slyly, asked: "Are there turnips in your bag, Hairy One?"

Skrymir frowned. "Turnips? Naw. Whatcha want with 'em?"

"Our warlock"—Loki jerked his thumb at Shea—"eats them."

"Wha-a-at? No kiddin'!" roared the giant. "I heard of guys that eat bugs and drink cow's milk, but I ain't never heard of nobody what eats turnips."

Shea said: "That's how I get some of my magic powers," with a somewhat sickly smile, and felt he had come out of it fairly well.

Skrymir belched. It was not an ordinary run-of-the-mine belch, but something akin to a natural cataclysm. Shea tried to hold his breath until the air cleared. The giant settled himself and inquired: "Say, how come youse is traveling in Jötunheim?"

"The Wing Thor travels where he will," observed Loki loftily, but with a side glance.

"Aw right, aw right, butcha don't have to get snotty about it. I just was thinking there's some relations of Hrungnir and Geirröd that was laying for Thor. They'd just love to have a chance to get even witcha for bumping off those giants."

Thor rumbled: "Few will be more pleased than I to meet—"

But Loki cut across his words, "Thank you for the warning, friend Skrymir. Good is the guesting when men are friendly. We will do as much for you one of these days. Will you have more salmon?"

"Naw, I had all I want."

Loki continued silkily, "Would it be impertinence to ask whither your giantship is bound?"

"Aw, I'm going up to Utgard. Utgardaloki's throwing a big feed for all the giants."

"Great and glorious will be that feasting."

"You're damn right it'll be great. All the hill giants and frost giants and fire giants together at once—say, that's something."

"It would give us pleasure to see it. If we went as guests of so formidable a giant as yourself, none of Hrungnir's or Geirröd's friends would dare make trouble, would they?"

Skrymir showed his snags in a pleased grin. "Them punks? Haw, they wouldn't do nothing." He picked his teeth thoughtfully for a moment with thumb and forefinger. "Yeah, I guess you can come. The big boss, Utgardaloki, is a good guy and a friend of mine. So you won't have no trouble. If youse'll clear outta my glove, we can start right now."

"What?" All four spoke at once.

"Yeah. My glove, that's what you slept in."

The implications of this statement were so alarming that the four travelers picked up their belongings and scrambled out of the shelter with ludicrous haste—the mighty Thor included.

THE RAIN had ceased. Ragged serpents of mist, pearly against the darker gray of the clouds, crawled over the hills. Outside, the travelers looked back at their shelter. There was no question that it was an enormous glove.

Skrymir grasped the upper edge of the opening with his left hand and thrust the right into the erstwhile dwelling. From where he stood, Shea couldn't see whether the big glove had shrunk to fit or whether it had faded out of sight and been replaced by a smaller one. At the same time he became suddenly conscious of the fact that he was wet to the skin.

Before he had a chance to think over the meaning of these facts, Thor was bellowing at him to help get the chariot loaded.

When he was sitting hunched up on the chest and swaying to the movement of the cart, Thjalfi murmured to him: "I knew Loki would get around the Hairy One. When it's something that calls for smartness, ye can depend on Uncle Fox, I always say."

Shea nodded silently and sneezed. He'd be lucky if he didn't come down with a first-class cold, riding in these wet garments. The landscape was wilder and bleaker around them than even on the previous day's journey. Ahead Skrymir tramped along, the bag on his back swaying with his strides, his sour sweat-smell wafting back over the chariot.

Wet garments. Why? The rain had stopped when they emerged from that monstrous glove. There was something peculiar about the whole business of that glove. The others, including the two gods, had unhesitatingly accepted its huge size as an indication that Skrymir was even larger and more powerful than he seemed. He was undoubtedly a giant—but hardly that much of a giant. Shea supposed that although the world he was in did not respond to the natural laws of that from which he had come, there was no reason to conceive that the laws of illusion had changed. He had studied psychology enough to know something of the standard methods used by stage magicians. But others, unfamiliar both with such methods and the technique of modern thought, would not think of criticizing observation with pure logic. For that matter, they would not think of

questioning the evidence of observation—

"You know," he whispered suddenly to Thjalfi, "I just wonder whether Loki is as clever as he thinks, and whether Skrymir isn't smarter than he pretends."

The servant of gods gave him a startled glance. "A mighty strange word is that. Why?"

"Well, didn't you say the giants would be fighting against the gods when this bish smash comes?"

"Truly I did:

'High blows Heimdall the horn is aloft;
The ash shall shake and the rime-giants ride
On the roads of hell—'

leastways that's what Voluspo says, the word of the prophetess."

"Then isn't Skrymir a shade too friendly with someone he's going to fight?"

Thjalfi gave a barking laugh. "Ye don't know much about Oku Thor to say that. This Skrymir may be big, but Redbeard has his strength belt on. He could twist that there giant right up, snip-snap."

Shea sighed. But he tried once more. "Well, look here, did you notice that when Skrymir put his gloves on, your clothes got wet all of a sudden?"

"Why, yes, now that I think of it."

"My idea is that there wasn't any giant glove there at all. It was an illusion, a magic, to scare us. We really slept in the open without knowing it, and got soaked. But whoever magicked us did a good job, so we didn't feel the wet till the spell was off and the big glove disappeared."

"Maybe so. But how does it signify?"

"It signifies that Skrymir didn't blunder into us by accident. It was a put-up job."

The rustic scratched his head in puzzlement. "Seems to me ye're being a little mite fancy, friend Harald." He looked around. "I wish we had Heimdall along. He can see a hundred leagues in the dark and hear the wool growing on a sheep's back. But 'twouldn't do to have him and Uncle Fox together. Thor's the only one of the Aesir that can stand Uncle Fox."

Shea shivered. "Say, friend Harald," offered Thjalfi, "how would ye like to run a few steps to warm up?"

Shea soon learned that Thjalfi's idea of warming up did not consist merely of dogtrotting behind the chariot. "We'll race to yonder boulder and back to the chariot," he said. "Be ye ready? Get set; go!" Before Shea fairly got into his stride, his woolens flapping around him, Thjalfi was halfway to the boulder, gravel flying under his shoes, and clothes fluttering stiffly behind him like a flag in a gale. Shea had not covered half the distance when Thjalfi passed him, grinning, on the way back. He had always considered himself a good runner, but against this human antelope it was no contest. Wasn't there *anything* in which he could hold his own against these people?

THJALFI helped pull him over the tail of the chariot. "Ye do a little better than most runners, friend Harald," he said, with the cheerfulness of superiority. "But I thought I'd give ye a little surprise, seeing as how maybe ye hadn't heard about my running. But"—he lowered his voice—"don't let Uncle Fox get ye into any contests. He'll make a wager and collect it out of your hide. Ye got to watch him that way."

"What's Loki's game, anyway?" asked Shea. "I heard Heimdall suggesting he might be on the other side at the big fight."

Thjalfi shrugged. "That there Child of Fury gets a little mite hasty about Loki. Guess he'll turn up on the right side all right, but he's a queer one. Always up to something, sometimes good, sometimes bad, and he won't let anyone boss him. There's a lay about him, the Lokasenna, ye know:

'I say to the gods and the sons of gods
The things that whet my thoughts;
By the wells of the world there is none with the might
To make me do his will.'"

That agreed fairly well with the opinion Shea had formed of the enigmatic Uncle Fox, but added a new facet. In spite of the difficulties of the jolting chariot, he would have liked to discuss the matter with Thjalfi. But he found that while he could form such concepts as delayed adolescence, superego, and sadism readily enough, he could think of no words to express them. If he wanted to be a practicing psychologist in this world, he would have to invent a whole terminology for the science.

He sneezed some more. He was catching cold, his nose clogging, his eyes running. The temperature was going down, and an icy breeze had risen that did nothing to add to his happiness.

They lunched without stopping, as they had on the previous day. As the puddles of the thaw began to develop crystals and the chariot wheels to crunch, Shea blew on his mittens and slapped himself. Thjalfi looked sympathetic. "Be ye really cold, friend Harald?" he said. "This is barely freezing. A few years back we had a winter so cold that when we made a fire in the open, the flames froze solid. I broke off some pieces, and for the rest of the winter, whenever we wanted a fire, I used one of them pieces to light it with. Would 'a' come in mighty handy this morning. My uncle Einarr traded off some as amber."

It was told with so straight a countenance, that Shea was not quite certain he was being kidded. In this world it *might* happen. But he felt silently miserable, and when he did not respond to Thjafi's advances, that young man gave it up as a bad job and they jolted along in silence.

The terrible afternoon finally waned. Skrymir was walking with head up now, looking around him. The giant waved toward a black spot on the side of a hill. "Hey, youse, there's a cave," he said. "Whatcha say we camp in there, huh?"

Thor looked around. "It is not too dark for more of progress."

Loki spoke up. "Not untrue, Powerful One. Yet I fear our warlock must soon freeze to an ice bone."

"Oh, dote bide be," said Shea, "I cad stad it." Perhaps he could; at least if they went on he wouldn't have to manhandle that chest halfway up the hill.

He was overruled, but, after all, did not have to carry the chest. When the chariot had been parked at the edge of a snowdrift, Skrymir calmly took that bulky object under one arm and led the way up the stony slope to the cave mouth.

"Could you get us fire?" Thor asked Skrymir.

"Sure thing, buddy." Skrymir strode down to a clump of small trees, pulled up a couple by the roots, and breaking them across his knee laid them for burning.

SHEA PUT his head into the cave. At first he was conscious of nothing but the rocky gloom. Then he sniffed. He hadn't been able to smell anything—not even Skrymir—for some hours, but now an odor pricked through the veil of his cold. A familiar odor—chlorine gas! What—

"Hey, you," roared Skrymir behind him. Shea jumped a foot. "Get the hell outta my way."

Shea got. Skrymir put his head down and whistled. At least he did what would have been called a whistle in a human being. From his lips it sounded more like an air-raid warning.

A little man about three feet tall, with a beard that made him look like a miniature Santa Claus, appeared at the mouth of the cave. He had a pointed hood, and the tail of his beard was tucked into his belt.

"Hey you," said Skyrmir. "Let's have some fire. Make it snappy." He pointed to the pile of logs and brush in front of the cave mouth.

"Yes, sir," said the dwarf. He toddled over to the pile and produced a coppery-looking bar out of his jacket. Shea watched the process with interest, but just then Loki tucked an icicle down his back, and when Shea had extracted it the fire was already burning with a hiss of damp wood.

The dwarf spoke up in a little chirping voice. "You are not planning to camp here, are you?"

"Yeah," replied Skrymir. "Now beat it."

"Oh, but you must not—"

"Shuttup!" bellowed the giant. "We camp where we damn please."

"Yessir. Thank you, sir. Anything else, sir?"

"Naw. Go on, beat it, before I step on you."

The dwarf vanished into the cave. They got their belongings out and disposed themselves around the fire, which took a long time to come to the point where it gave off any considerable heat. The setting sun broke through the clouds for a minute and smeared them with streaks of lurid vermilion. To Shea's imagination, the clouds took on the form of apocalyptic monsters. Far in the distance he heard the cry of a wolf.

Thjalfi looked up suddenly, frowning. "What's that noise?"

"What noise?" said Thor. Then he jumped up—he had been sitting with his back to the cave mouth—and spun around. "Hai, Clever One, our cave is already not untenanted!" He backed away slowly. From the depths of the cave there came a hiss like that of a steam pipe leak, followed by a harsh, metallic cry.

"A dragon!" cried Thjalfi. There was a puff of yellow gas from the cave, setting them all coughing. More chlorine thought Shea, scrambling to his feet. A scrape of scales, a rattle of loose stones, and in the dark a pair of yellow eyes the size of dinner plates caught the reflection of the fire. The Aesir, the giant and Thjalfi shouted incoherently, grabbing for whatever might serve as a weapon.

"Here, I cad take care of hib!" shouted Shea, forgetting his previous reasoning in the excitement of the moment, as he leaped forward, whipping out the revolver. As the great snakelike head came into view in the firelight, he aimed at one of the eyes and pulled the trigger.

The hammer clicked harmlessly. He tried again, and again, desperately. *Click, click,* and the jaws came open with a reek of chlorine.

Half-stifled, wondering in a dreadful flash how it felt to be eaten by a dragon, Harold Shea went staggering back and down with the eyes following him. But as he stumbled there was a flash of movement past his head, and the butt end of a young tree, wielded by Skrymir, swished down on the beast's head.

The eyes rolled, the head half turned toward the giant. Before it could do more, Thor had leaped in with a roaring yell that resembled a

laugh, and let fly a right hook that would have demolished Joe Louis. There was a crunch of snapping bones; the fist sank right into the reptile's face. With a scream like that of a disemboweled horse the head vanished into the cave.

Shea became conscious of Thjalfi helping him up. "Now maybe ye can see," remarked the servant of gods, "why Skrymir would as lief not take chances with the Lord of the Goats." He chuckled. "That there dragon's going to have him a toothache next spring—if there is any spring before the *Time*."

The dwarf popped out again. "Hai, Skrymir!"

"Huh?"

"I tried to warn you that a fire would bring the dragon out of hibernation. But you wouldn't listen. Think you're smart, don't you? Yah! Yah! Yah!" The vest-pocket Santa Claus capered in the cave mouth for an instant. Then he vanished as Skrymir picked up a stone to throw.

The giant lumbered over to the cave and felt around inside. "Never catch the little totrug now. They have burrows all through these hills," he observed gloomily.

THE EVENING MEAL was eaten in a silence made more pointed for Shea by the fact that he felt it was mostly directed at himself. This time his failure had been ignominious and utterly complete; might have involved not only destruction to himself, but danger to the others, but for the courage and strength of Thor. He ought to have known better, he told himself, bitterly.

In fact, he ought to have known better than to embark on such an expedition at all. Damn fool business, which had not only failed to relieve him from the sense of inferiority and maladjustments of his old world, but had plunged him into a more inferior position in this new one. And one for which he was still less suited. If he could have used the formulas to return instantly, he would.

But he could not. That was the point. The formulas didn't exist any more, as far as he was concerned. Nothing existed but the bleak, snow-bound hillside, the nauseating giant, the two Aesir and their servant regarding him with aversion. There was nothing he could do—

Whoa, Shea, steady, he remarked to himself. You're talking yourself into a state of melancholy, which is, as Chalmers once remarked, of no philosophical or practical value. The intelligent, the logical thing to do, was not to bemoan the past but to live in the present, get as much out of this peculiar system of life as possible. He lacked the physical equipment to follow Thor's advice and imitate that worthy's strong and forthright approach to problems. But he could at least come somewhere near Loki's sardonic and intelligent humor.

And speaking of intelligence, had he not already decided to make use of it in discovering what laws governed this world? Laws which these people were not fitted, by their mental habit, to deduce? Perhaps the road to rehabilitation in their opinion lay in that direction.

He turned suddenly and asked: "Didn't that dwarf say the fire fetched the dragon out of hibernation?"

Skrymir yawned, and spoke. "Yeah. What about it, snotty?"

"Well the fire's still here. What if he, or another one comes back during the night?"

"Prob'ly eat you, and serve you right." He cackled a laugh.

"The niggeling speaks sooth," said Loki. "It were best to move our camp."

There was an accent of contempt in the voice that made Shea wince. But he went on. "We don't have to do that, do we, sir? It's freezing now and getting colder. If we take some of that snow and stuff it into the cave, it seems to me the dragon would hardly come out across it."

Loki slapped a knee. "Soundly and well said, turnip-man! Now you and Thjalfi shall do it. I perceive you are not altogether without your uses, since there has been a certain gain in wit since you joined our party. Who would have thought of stopping a dragon with snow?"

Thor grunted.

VIII.

When Shea awoke he was still sniffling, but at least his head was of normal weight. He wondered whether the chlorine he had inhaled the previous evening might not have helped the cold. Or whether the improvement were a general one, based on his determination to accept his surroundings and make the most of them.

After breakfast they set out as before, Skrymir tramping on ahead. The sky was the color of old lead. The wind was keen, rattling the branches of the scrubby trees and whirling an occasional snowflake before it. The goats slipped on patches of frozen slush, plodding uphill most of the time. The hills were all about them now, rising steadily and with more vegetation, mostly pine and spruce.

It must have been around noon—Shea could only guess at the time—when Skrymir turned and waved at the biggest mountain they had yet seen. The wind carried away the giant's words, but Thor seemed to have understood. The goats quickened their pace toward the mountain, whose top hung in cloud.

After a good hour of climbing, Shea began to get glimpses of a shape looming from the bare crest, intermittently blotted out by the eddies of mist. When they were close enough to see it plainly, it became clearly a house, not unlike that of the bonder Sverre. But it was cruder, made of logs with the bark on, and vastly bigger—as big as a metropolitan railroad terminal.

Thjalfi said into his ear: "That will be Utgard Castle. Ye will need whatever mite of courage ye have here, friend Harald." To Shea's surprise, the blond man's teeth were chattering in a manner that eliminated the possibility that the weather was responsible.

Skrymir lurched up to the door and pounded on it with his fist. He stood there for a long minute, the wind shrieking through his furred garments, till a rectangular hole opened in the door. They heard him bellow his name through the aperture. The door swung open and the chariot riders climbed down, stretching their stiff muscles as they followed their guide.

The door banged shut behind them. They were in a dark vestibule, like that in Sverre's house but larger and foul with the odor of unwashed giant. A huge arm pushed the leather curtain aside, revealing through the triangular opening a view of roaring yellow flame and thronging, shouting giants.

Thjalfi murmured: "Keep your eyes open, Harald. As Thjodolf of Hvin says:

> 'All the gateways ere one goes out
> Thoughtfully should a man scan;
> Uncertain it is where sits the unfriendly
> Upon the bench before thee.'"

WITHIN, the place was an outrageous and disorderly parody of Sverre's. Of the same general form, with the same benches, its tables were all uneven, filthy, and littered with fragments of food. The fire in the center hung a pall of smoke under the rafters. The dirty straw on the floor was thick about the ankles.

But the feature that drew Shea's attention was that the benches and the passageway behind them were filled with giants, drinking, eating, shouting at the tops of their voices. Before him a group of six, with iron-gray topknots and patchy beards like Skrymir's, were engaged in some wrangle. One drew back his arm in a gesture of anger. His elbow struck a mug of mead borne by a harassed-looking man who was evidently a thrall. The mead splashed onto another giant, who instantly snatched up a bowl of stew from the table and slammed it on the man's head.

Down went the man with a squeal. Skrymir calmly kicked him from the path of his guests. The six giants burst into bubbling laughter, rolling in their seats and clapping each other on the back, their argument forgotten.

"Hi, Skridbaldnir!" Skrymir was gripping another giant on the bench by the arm. "How's every little thing wit' you? Commere, I wantcha to meet a friend of mine. This here guy's Asa Thor!"

Skridbaldnir turned. Shea noticed that he was slenderer than Skrymir, with ash-blond hair, the pink eyes of an albino and a long, red ulcerated nose.

"He's a frost giant," whispered Thjalfi, "and that gang over there are fire giants." He waved a trembling hand toward the other side of the table, where a group of particularly unpleasant individuals, not unlike taller and straighter gorillas, were howling at each other over some pointless joke. Shorter than the other giants, not much more than eight feet, they had prognathous jaws and coarse black hair where their bodies were exposed. They scratched ceaselessly.

Halfway down the hall, at one side, sat the biggest hill giant of all, in a huge chair with interwoven serpents carved on the legs and arms. His costume was distinguished from those of the other giants in that the bone skewers through his topknot had rough gold knobs on their ends. One of his lower snag teeth projected for several inches beyond his upper lip. He looked at Skrymir and said: "Hai, bud. I see you got some kids witcha. It ain't a good idea to bring kids to these feeds; they learns bad language."

"They ain't kids," said Skrymir. "They're a couple men and a couple of Aesir. I told 'em they could come wit' me. That O. K., boss?"

Utgardaloki picked his nose and wiped his fingers on his greasy, leather jacket before replying: "Huh-uh, I guess so. But ain't that one with the red whiskers Asa Thor?"

"You are not mistaken," said Thor.

"Well, well, you don't say so. I always thought Thor was a big husky guy."

THOR stuck out his chest, scowling. "It is ill to jest with the Aesir, giant."

"Ho, ho, ain't he the cutest little fella?" Utgardaloki paused to capture a small creeping thing that had crawled out of his left eyebrow and crack it between his teeth.

"A fair arrangement," murmured Loki in Shea's ear. "They live on him; he lives on them."

Utgardaloki continued ominously:

"But whatcha doing here, youse? This is a respectable party, see, and I don't want no trouble."

Thor said: "I have come for my hammer, Mjöllnir."

"Huh? What makes ya think we got it?"

"Ask not of the tree where it got its growth or of the gods their wisdom. Will you give it up, or do I have to fight you for it?"

"Aw, don't be like that Oku Thor. Sure, I'd give you your piddling nutcracker if I knew where it was."

"Nutcracker! Why you—"

"Easy!" Shea could hear Loki's whisper. "Son of Odinn, with the strong use strength; with the liar, lies." He turned to Utgardaloki and bowed mockingly: "Chief of giants, we thank you for your courtesy and will not trouble you long. Trusting your word, lord, as we do, are we to understand that Mjöllnir is not here?"

" 'Tain't here as far as I know," replied Utgardaloki, spitting on the floor and rubbing his bare foot over the spot, with just a hint of uneasiness.

"Might it not have been brought hither without your knowledge?"

Utgardaloki shrugged. "How in hell should I know? I said as far as I knew. This is a hell of a way to come at your host."

"Evidently there is no objection should the desire come upon us to search the place."

"Huh? You're damn right there's objections! This is my joint and I don't let no foreigners go sniffing around."

Loki smiled ingratiatingly. "Greatest of the Jötun, your objection is but natural with one who knows his own value. But the gods do not idly speak; we believe Mjöllnir is here, and have come in peace to ask it, rather than in arms with Odinn and his spear at our head, Heimdall and his great sword and Ullr's deadly bow. Now you shall let us search for the hammer, or we will go away and return with them to make you such a feasting as you will not soon forget. But if we fail to find it we will depart in all peace. This is my word."

"And mine!" cried Thor, his brows knitting. Beside him Shea noticed Thjalfi's face go the color of skimmed milk and was slightly surprised to find himself unafraid. But that may be because I don't understand the situation, he told himself.

Utgardaloki scratched thoughtfully, his lips working. "Tell you what," he said at last. "Youse Aesir are sporting gents, ain't youse?"

"It is not to be denied," said Loki guardedly, "that we enjoy sports."

"I'll make youse a sporting proposition. You think youse are great athaletes. Well, we got pretty tough babies here, too. We'll have some games, and if youse beat us at even one of 'em, see? I'll let you go ahead and search. If youse lose, out you get."

"What manner of games?"

"Hell, sonny, anything youse want."

Thor's face had gone thoughtful. "I am not unknown as a wrestler," he remarked.

"Awright," said Utgardaloki. "We'll find someone to rassle you down. Can youse do anything else?"

Loki spoke up. "I will meet your best champion at eating; and our man Thjalfi here will run a race with you. Asa Thor also will undertake any trial of strength you care to hold."

"Swell. Me, I think these games are kid stuff, see? But it oughta be fun for some of the gang to see youse take your licking. HAI! Bring Elli

up here; here's a punk that wants to rassle!"

WITH a good deal of shouting and confusion a space was cleared near the fire in the center of the hall. Thor was standing with fists on hips, waiting the giants' champion, but a moment later there came forward, not a giant, but a tall old woman. She was at least a hundred, a hunched bag of bones covered by thin, almost transparent skin, as wrinkled as the surface of a file.

Thor shouted: "What manner of jest is this, Utgardaloki? It is not to be said that Asa Thor wrestles with women."

"Oh, don't worry none, kid. She *likes* it, don'tcha, Elli?"

The crone bared toothless gums. "Yep," she quavered. "And many's the good man I put down, heh, heh."

"But—" began Thor.

"Y'ain't scared to work up a reputation, are you?"

"Ha! Thor afraid! Not of aught the giant kindred can do." Thor puffed out his chest.

"I gotta explain the rules." Utgardaloki put a hand on the shoulder of each contestant and muttered at them.

Shea felt his arm pinched and looked into the bright eyes of Loki. "Great and evil is the magic in this place," whispered Uncle Fox, "and I misdoubt me we are to be tricked, for never before have I heard of such a wrestling. But it may be that the spells they use are spells against gods alone and not for the eyes of men. Now I have here a spell against spells, and while these contests go forward you shall take it." He handed Shea a piece of very thin parchment, covered with spidery runic writing. "Repeat it forward, then backward, then forward again, looking as you do at the object you suspect of being an illusion. It may be you will see on the wall the hammer we seek."

"Wouldn't the giants hide it away, sir?"

"Not with their boasting and vainglorious habit. It—"

"Awright," said Utgardaloki in a huge voice, "go!"

Thor, roaring like a lion, seized Elli as though he intended to dash her brains out on the floor. But Elli might have been nailed where she was. Her rickety frame did not budge. Thor fell silent, wrenching at the crone's arms and body. He turned purple in the face from the effort; the giants around murmured appreciatively.

Shea glanced at the slip Loki had given him. The words were readable, though they seemed to consist of meaningless strings of syllables—"Nyi-Nidi-Nordri-Sudri, Austri-Vestri-Althj-of-Dvalinn." But he obediently repeated it according to the directions, looking at a giant's club that hung on the wall. It remained a giant's club, and he turned back to the wrestling where Thor was puffing with effort, his forehead beaded with sweat.

"Witch!" Thor shouted at last, and seized her arm to twist it. Elli caught his neck with her free hand. There was a second's scuffle and Thor skidded away, falling to one knee.

"That's enough!" said Utgardaloki, stepping between them. "That counts as a fall; Elli wins. I guess it's a good job you didn't try to rassle with any of the *big* guys here, eh, Thor, old kid?" The other giants roared an approval that drowned Thor's growl of anger, and pushed in, shouting for mead.

Utgardaloki continued: "Awright, youse, stand back! Get back, I say, or I'll cut the blood-eagle on a couple

Shea'd done seventy on a concrete road in a well-sprung automobile—but never in such a vehicle as this!

of youse! Next event's an eating contest. Bring Logi up here, we got some eating for him to do."

A FIRE GIANT shuffled through the press. His black hair had a reddish tinge, and his movements were quick and animallike. "Is it lunch time yet?" he rasped. "Them three elk I et for breakfast just kinda got my appetite going."

Utgardaloki explained and intro-

duced him to his opponent. "Please to meetchz," said Logi. "I always like to see a guy what appreciates good food. Say, you oughta come down to Muspellheim sometime. We got a cook there what knows how to roast whale right. He uses a charcoal fire and bastes it with bear grease—"

"That'll do, Logi," said Utgardaloki. "You get that guy talking about the meals he's et and he'll talk till the *Time* comes."

Shea was being pushed back by giants as they crowded in, dodging the press of huge stinking bodies. An eddy of the crowd carried him still farther away from the scene of action as the giants made way for a little procession of harried-looking slaves. They bore two huge wooden platters, on each of which rested an entire roasted elk haunch. Shea stood on tiptoe and stretched; between a pair of massive shoulders he glimpsed Utgardaloki taking his place at the middle of a long table; at each end of which sat one of the contestants.

A shoulder moved across Shea's field of vision, and he glanced up at the owner. It was a comparatively short giant, who bulged out in the middle to make up for his lack of stature. A disorderly mop of black-and-white hair covered his head. But the thing that struck Shea with the force of a blow was that, as the giant turned profile to watch the eaters get ready, the eye that looked from under the piebald thatch was bright *blue*.

That was wrong. Fire giants, as he had noted, had black eyes, hill giants gray or black eyes, frost giants pink. His mind had automatically noted these characteristics as specific, so that the variation struck him. Of course, this giant might have a trace of some other blood—but there was a familiar angle to that long, high-bridged nose and something phony-looking about the mop of hair. Heimdall!

Shea whispered behind his hand: "How many mothers did you have, giant with the uncombed thatch?"

He heard a low chuckle and the answer came back: "Thrice three, man from an unknown world! But there is no need to shout; I can hear your lightest whisper, even your thoughts half formed."

"I think we're being tricked," continued Shea. He didn't say it even in a whisper this time, merely thought it, moving his lips.

The answer was pat: "That is what was to be expected, and for no other reason did I come hither. Yet I have not solved the nature of the spells."

Shea said: "I have been taught a spell"—and remembered Heimdall's enmity to Loki and all his works, just in time to keep from mentioning Uncle Fox—"which may be of use in such a case."

"Then use it," Heimdall answered, "while you watch the contest."

"Awright, ready, you two?" Utgardaloki was shouting. "Go!"

The giants gave a shout. Shea, his eyes fixed on Loki, was repeating: "Nyi—Nidri—Nordri-Sudri." The sly god bounced in his oversize chair as he applied his teeth to the elk haunch. The meat was disappearing in hunks the size of a man's fist at the rate of two hunks per second. Shea had never seen anything like it, and wondered where Loki was putting it all. He heard Thjalfi's voice, sounding thin in the basso-profundo clamor of the giants and cracking a trifle at the top of the shout: "Besit yourself, Son of Laufey!"

Then the bone, the size of a baseball bat, was clean. Loki dropped

it clattering to the platter and sat back with a sigh. A whoop, mingled with laughter and cheers, went up from the assembled giants, and Shea saw Loki start forward again, the eyes popping from his head, as Utgardaloki walked to the opposite end of the table, bellowing: "Logi wins!"

Shea turned to look at the other contestant. But his head came in contact with a giant's elbow so violently that he saw stars and his eyes beaded with tears. And as he did so, whether it was the words of the spell he had been mechanically repeating, or the refraction of the teardrop across his vision, for one fleeting second he saw no Logi there at all, only a great leaping flame at the opposite end of the table. A flicker —the teardrop was gone, and with it the picture.

Logi sat contentedly at the other end of the table, and Loki was crying: "He finished no sooner than myself!"

"Yeah, sonny boy, but he et the bone and the platter too. I said Logi wins!" boomed Utgardaloki.

"Heimdall!" Shea said it so loud that the god thrust a monitory hand toward him, but fortunately the uproar around drowned his voice. "It *is* a trick, an illusion. Logi is a flame."

"Now, good luck go with your eyes, no-warlock and warlock. Warn Asa Thor, and use your spell on whatever you can see, for it is more than ever important that the hammer be found. Surely, these tricks and sleights and tricks must mean the *Time* is even nearer than we think, and the giants are desirous not to see that weapon in the hands of Redbeard. Go!"

UTGARDALOKI, posted on the table where the eating contest had been held, was directing the clearing of a section of the hall. "The next event is a footrace," he was shouting. "You, shrimp!"—Utgardaloki pointed at Thjalfi. "You're going to run against my son Hugi. Where is that young half-wit? *Hugi!*"

"Here I am, pop." A gangling, adolescent giant wormed his way to the front. He had little forehead and less chin, and a crop of pimples the size of poker chips. "You want me to run against him? He, he, he!" Hugi drooled down his chin as he laughed.

Shea ducked and dodged, squeezing through toward Thor, who was frowning with concentration as he watched the preparations for the race. Thjalfi and the drooling Hugi placed themselves at one end of the hall. "Go!" cried Utgardaloki, and they raced for the far end of the hall, a good three hundred yards away. Thjalfi went like the wind, but Hugi went like a bullet. By the time Thjalfi had reached the far end his opponent was halfway back.

"Hugi wins first heat!" roared Utgardaloki above a tornado of sound. "It's two outta three."

The crowd loosened a little as the contestants caught their breath and Shea found himself beside Thor and Loki.

"Hai, Turnip Harald," rumbled the Redbeard, "where have you been?"

"It is more like anything else that he has been concealed under a table like a mouse," remarked Loki, but Shea was too full of his news to resent anything.

"They're trying to put over tricks on you—on us," he burst out. "All these contests are illusions."

He could see Thor's lips curl. "Your warlock can see deeper into a millstone than most," growled he angrily to Loki.

"No, but I mean it, really." Hugi

had just passed them to take his place for the second heat, the hall's huge central fire on the other side. "Look," said Shea. "That runner of theirs. He casts no shadow!"

Thor glanced and as comprehension spread across his features, turned purple. But just then Utgardaloki cried "Go!" again, and the second race was on. It was a repetition of the first, and Utgardaloki announced over a delighted uproar from the assembled giants that Hugi was the winner.

"I am to pick up their damned cat next," growled Thor. "If that be another trick of theirs, I'll—"

"Not so loudly," whispered Loki. "Soft and slow is the sly fox taken. Now Thor, you shall try this cat-lifting as though nothing were amiss. But Harald here, who is only half subject to their spells because he is a mortal and without fear, shall search for Mjöllnir. Youngling, you are our hope and stay. Use, use the spell I gave you."

A chorus of yells announced that Utgardaloki's cat had arrived. It was a huge beast, gray, and the size of a puma. But it did not look too big for the burly Thor to lift. It glared suspiciously at Thor and spat a little.

Utgardaloki rumbled: "Quiet, you. Ain'tcha got no manners?" The cat subsided and allowed Thor to scratch it behind the ears, though with no appearance of pleasure at the caress.

How had he seen through the illusion of the eating contest? Shea asked himself, repeating the spell Loki had given him. A teardrop in the eye. Would he have to bang his head again to get another one? He closed his eyes and then opened them again, looking at Thor as he put an arm around the big cat's belly and heaved. No teardrop. The cat's belly came up, but its four big paws remained firmly planted.

How to induce a teardrop? A mug of mead stood on the table—that was it! Shea dipped a finger into the liquid and shook a drop into his eye. The alcohol in it burned and stung, and he could hear Thor's grunt and the whooping of the giants. He shook his head and opened the eye again. Through a film of tears, as he repeated "Sudri-Nordri-Nidi-Nyi—" he could see it was not a cat Thor was lifting, but the middle part of a snake as big around as a barrel. There was no sign of head or tail; the visible section was of uniform thickness, going in one door of the hall and out the other.

"Loki!" he said. "That's not a cat. It's a giant snake that Thor's trying to lift!"

"With a strange shimmering blackish cast over its scales?"

"Yes; and no head or tail in sight."

"Now, right good are your eyes, eater of turnips! That will be nothing less than the Midgard Serpent that curls round the earth! Surely we are surrounded by evil things. Hurry with the finding of the hammer, for this is now our only hope."

SHEA TURNED from the contest, making a desperate effort to concentrate. He looked at the nearest object, an auroch's skull on a pillar, tried another drop of mead in his eye and repeated the spell, forward, backward, and forward. No result. The skull was a skull. Thor was still grunting and heaving. Shea tried once more on a knife hanging at a giant's belt. No result.

He looked at a quiver of arrows on the opposite wall and tried again. The sweet mead was sticking his eyelashes together and he felt sure he would have a headache after this.

The quiver blurred as he pronounced the words and he found himself looking at a short-handled sledge hammer hanging by a rawhide loop.

Thor had given up the effort to lift the cat and came over to them, panting. Utgardaloki grinned down at him with the indulgence one might show a child. All around the giants were breaking up into little groups, laughing, shouting, and calling for more drink.

"Want any more, sonny boy?" the giant chieftain sneered. "Guess you ain't so damn good as you thought you was, huh?"

Shea plucked at Thor's sleeve as the latter flushed and started to make a retort. "Can you call your hammer to you?" he whispered.

The giant's ears apparently caught the words. "Beat it, thrall," he said belligerently. "We got business to settle and I won't have no snotty little mortals butting in. Now, Asa Thor, do youse want any more contests?"

"I—" began Thor again.

Shea clung insistently to his arm. "*Can* you?" he demanded, urgently.

"Aye, if it be in view."

"I said get outta here, punk!" bellowed Utgardaloki, the rough good nature vanishing from his face. He raised an arm like a tree trunk.

"Point at that quiver of arrows and call!" shouted Shea, and dodged behind Thor as the giant's arm descended. The blow missed. He scuttled among the crowding monsters, hitting his head against the pommel of a giant's sword. Utgardaloki was roaring behind him. He ducked under a table and past some foul-smelling fire giants, and heard a clank of metal as Thor pulled on the iron gloves he carried at his belt. Then over all other sounds rose the voice of the red-bearded god, making even Utgardaloki's voice sound like a whisper:

"Mjöllnir the mighty, slayer of miscreants, come to your master, Thor Odinnsson!"

IX.

For a few breathless seconds the hall seemed to hang in a state of suspended animation. Shea could see a giant just in front of him with mouth wide open, Adam's apple rising and falling. Then there was a rending snap. With a deep humming, the hammer that had seemed a quiver of arrows flew straight through the air into Thor's hands.

There was a deafening yell from the swarms of giants. They swayed back, then forward, squeezing Shea so tightly he could hardly breathe. High over the tumult rose the voice of Thor:

"I am Thor! I am the Thunderer! Ho, ho, hohoho, yoyoho!" The hammer was whirling round his head faster than the eye could follow, sparks dancing round it. Level flashes of lightning cracked across the hall followed by deafening peals of thunder. There was a shriek from the giants and a rush toward the doors.

Shea shot one glimpse as the hammer flew at Utgardaloki and spattered his brains into pink oatmeal, rebounding back into Thor's gloves. Then he was caught completely in the panic rush and almost squeezed to death. Fortunately for him, the giants on either side wedged him so tightly he couldn't fall to be trampled.

The pressure suddenly gave way in front. With a desperate effort Shea caught the giant ahead of him around the waist and hung on. Behind came Thor's battle howl, mingled with constant thunder and the sound of the hammer shattering

giant skulls—a noise that in a calmer moment Shea might have compared to that made by dropping a watermelon ten stories. The Wielder of Mjöllnir was thoroughly enjoying himself; his shouts now mingled with tremendous rumbling laughter like the noise of a happy express train.

Shea found himself outside and running across damp moss in the middle of hundreds of galloping giants and thralls. He dared not stop lest he be stepped on. An outcrop of rock with trees sprouting from its top forced him to swerve. As he did so he caught sight of Utgard from the tail of his eye. There was already a yawning gap at one end of the roof. He saw the central beam split, a vivid spear of blue-green lightning shoot skyward, and the place begin to burn brightly around the edges of the rent.

Another clump of trees cut off the view, and Shea was running downhill with giants still all around him. One of the group just ahead missed his footing and went rolling. Before Shea could stop, he had tripped across the fellow's legs, his face plowing up cold dirt and pine needles. A giant's voice shouted: "Hey, gang! Look at this!"

"Now they've got me," he thought, and rolled over, his head swimming from the jar. But it was not him they were interested in. The giant over whose legs he had fallen was Heimdall, his improvised wig knocked askew to reveal a patch of golden hair, the straw with which he had stuffed his jacket dribbling out. He was struggling to get up; around him a group of fire giants were gripping his arms and legs, kicking and cuffing at him. There was a babble of rough voices:

"He's one of the Aesir, all right." "Sock him!" "Let's get out of here!" "Which one is he?" "Get the horses!"

If he could get away, Shea thought, he could at least take news of Heimdall's plight to Thor. He started to crawl behind the projecting root of a tree, but the movement was fatal. One of the fire giants hallooed: "There's another one!"

Shea was caught, jerked upright, and inspected by half a dozen of the filthy gorillalike beings, who seemed to take particular delight in pulling his hair and ears.

"Aw," said one of them, "he's no As. Bump him off and let's get t' hell out of here."

One of them loosened a knife at his belt. Shea felt a deadly constriction of fear around the heart. But the largest of the lot—leadership seemed to go with size in giantland—roared: "Lay off! He was with that yellow-headed stümper. Maybe he's one of the Vanes and we can get something for him. Anyway, it's up to Lord Surt. Where the hell are those horses?"

At that moment more fire giants appeared, leading a group of horses. They were glossy black and bigger than the largest Percherons Shea had ever seen. Three hoofs were on each foot, as with the ancestral Miocene horse; their eyes glowed red like live coals and their breath made Shea cough. He thought instantly of the phrase he had heard Heimdall whispering to Odinn in Sverre's house—"the fire horses."

One of the giants produced some leather cords from a pouch. Shea and Heimdall were bound with brutal efficiency and tossed on the back of one of the horses, one hanging down on either side. The giants clucked to their mounts, which started off at a trot through the gathering dusk among the trees.

Far behind them the thunders of Thor still rolled. From time to time his distant lightnings cast sudden

shadows along their path. The redbeard was certainly having fun.

THE AGONIZING hours that followed left little detailed impression on Harold Shea's mind. They would not, he told himself even while experiencing them—thankful that his knowledge of psychology allowed him to philosophize on the impermanence of painful impressions. The impression was certainly painful while being undergone. There was nothing to see but misty darkness; nothing to feel but breakneck speed and the torment of his bonds. He could twist his head a little, but of their path could obtain no impression but now and then the ghost of a boulder or a clump of trees momentarily lit by the fiery eyes of the horses. Every time he thought of the speed they were making along the rough and winding route his stomach crawled and the muscles of his right leg tensed as he tried to apply an imaginary automobile brake.

When the sky finally turned to its wearisome blotting-paper gray the air was a little warmer, though still raw. A light drizzle was sifting down. They were in a countryside of a type totally unfamiliar to Shea. A boundless plain of tumbled black rock rose here and there to cones of varying size. Some of the cones smoked, and little pennons of steam wafted from cracks in the basalt. The vegetation consisted mostly of clumps of small palmlike tree ferns in the depressions.

They had slowed down to a fast trot, the horses picking their way over the ropy bands of old lava flows. Now and again one or more fire giants would detach themselves from the party and set off on a tangent to the main course.

Finally, a score of the giants clustered around the horse that bore the prisoners, making toward a particularly large cone from whose flanks a number of smoke plumes rose through the drizzle. To Shea the fire giants still looked pretty much alike, but he had no difficulty in picking out the big authoritative one who had directed his capture.

They halted in front of a gash in the rock. The giants dismounted, and one by one led their steeds through the opening. The animals' hoofs rang echoing on the rock floor of the passage, which sprang above their heads in a lofty vault till it suddenly ended with a right-angled turn. The cavalcade halted; Shea heard a banging of metal on metal, the creak of a rusty hinge, and a giant voice that cried: "Whatcha want?"

"It's the gang, back from Jötunheim. We got one of the Aesir and a Vane. Tell Lord Surt."

"Howdja make out at Utgard?"

"Lousy. Thor showed up. He spotted the hammer somehow, the scum, and called it to him and busted things wide open. It was that smart-Aleck Loki, *I* think."

"What was the matter with the Sons of the Wolf? They know what to do about old Red Whiskers."

"Didn't show. I suppose we gotta wait for the *Time* for them to come around."

The horses tramped on. As they passed the gatekeeper, Shea noticed that he held a sword along which flickered a yellow flame with thick, curling smoke rising from it, as though burning oil were running down the blade. Ahead and slanting downward, the place they had entered seemed an underground hall of vaguely huge proportions, full of great pillars. Flares of yellow light threw changing shadows as they moved. There was a stench of sulphur and a dull, machinelike bang-

ing. As the horses halted behind some pillars that grew together to make another passage, a thin shriek ululated in the distance: "Eee-e-e."

"Bring the prisoners along," said a voice. "Lord Surt wants to judge 'em."

SHEA FELT himself removed and tucked under a giant's arm like a bundle. It was a method of progress that woke all the agonies in his body. The giant was carrying him face down, so that he could see nothing but the stone floor with its flickering shadows. The place stank.

A door opened and there was a babble of giant voices. Shea was flung upright. He would have fallen if the giant who had been carrying him had not propped him up. He was in a torchlit hall, very hot, with fire giants standing all around, grinning, pointing, and talking, some of them drinking.

But he had no more than a glance for them. Right in front, facing him, flanked by two guards who carried the curious burning swords, sat the biggest giant of all—a giant dwarf. That is, he was a full giant in size, at least eleven feet tall, but with the squat bandy legs, the short arms and huge neckless head of a dwarf. His hair hung lank around the nastiest grin Shea had ever seen. When he spoke the voice had not the rumble of the other giants, but a reedy, mocking falsetto:

"Welcome, Lord Heimdall, to Muspellheim! We are delighted to have you here." He snickered. "I fear gods and men will be somewhat late in assembling for the battle without their horn blower. Hee, hee, hee. But, at least, we can give you the comforts of one of our best dungeons. If you must have music, we will provide a willow whistle. Hee, hee, hee. Surely so skilled a musician as yourself could make it heard throughout the nine worlds." He ended with another titter at his own humor.

Heimdall kept his air of dignity. "Bold are your words, Surt," he replied, "but it is yet to be seen whether your deeds match them when you stand on Vigrid Plain. It may be that I have small power against you of the Muspellheim blood. Yet I have a brother named Frey, and it is said that if you two come face to face, he will be your master."

Surt sucked two fingers to indicate his contempt. "Hee, hee, hee. It is also said, most stupid of godlings, that Frey is powerless without his sword. Would you like to know where the enchanted blade, Hundingsbana is? Look behind you, Lord Heimdall!"

Shea followed the direction of Heimdall's eyes. Sure enough, on the wall there hung a great two-handed sword, its blade gleaming brightly in that place of glooms, its hilt all worked with gold up to the jeweled pommel.

"While it hangs there, most stupid of Aesir, I am safe. Hee, hee, hee. Have you been wondering why that famous eyesight of yours did not light on it before? Now you know, most easily deceived. In Muspellheim, we have found the spells that make Heimdall powerless."

Heimdall was unimpressed. "Thor has his hammer back," he remarked easily. "Not a few of your fire giants' heads will bear witness—if you can find them."

Surt scowled and thrust his jaw forward, but his piping voice was as serene and mocking as before. "Now, that," he said, "really gives me an idea. I thank you, Lord Heimdall. Who would have thought it possible to learn anything from one

of the Aesir? Hee, hee, hee. Skoa!"

A lop-eared fire giant shuffled forward. "Whatcha want, boss?"

"Ride to the gates of Asgard. Tell them I have their horn tooter here. I will gladly send the nuisance back to his relatives; but in exchange I want that sword of his, the one they call Head. Hee, hee, hee. I am collecting gods' swords, and we shall see, Lord Heimdall, how you fare against the frost giants without yours."

He grinned all around his face and the fire giants in the background slapped their knees and whooped. "Pretty hot stuff, boss!" "Ain't he smart?" "Two of the four great weapons!" "Boy, will we show 'em!"

Surt gazed at Shea and Heimdall for a moment, enjoying to the utmost the roar of appreciation and Heimdall's sudden pallor. Then he made a gesture of dismissal. "Take the animals away and put 'em in a dungeon before I die laughing."

Shea felt himself seized once more and carried off, face downward in the same ignominious position as before.

X.

Down—down—down they went, stumbling through the lurid semi-dark. At last they came to a passage lined with cells between whose bars the hollow eyes of previous arrivals stared at them. The stench had become overpowering.

The commanding giant thundered: "Stegg!"

There was a stir in an alcove at the far end of the passage, and out came a scaly being about five feet tall, with an oversize head decorated by a snub nose and a pair of long pointed ears. Instead of hair and beard it had wormlike excrescences on its head. They moved. The being squeaked: "Yes, lord!"

The giant said: "Got a couple more prisoners for you. Say, what stinks?"

"Please, lord, mortal him die. Five days gone."

"You lug! And you left him in there?"

"No lord here. Snögg say 'no,' must have lord's orders to do—"

"You damn nitwit! Take him out and give him to the furnace detail! Hai, wait, take care of these prisoners first. Hai, bolt the door, somebody. We don't take no chances with the Aesir."

Stegg set about efficiently stripping Shea and Heimdall. Shea wasn't especially afraid. So many extraordinary things had happened to him lately that the whole proceeding possessed an air of unreality. Besides, even the difficulties of such a place might not be beyond the resources of a well-applied brain.

Stegg said: "Lord, must put in dead mortal's cell. No more. All full."

"Awright, get in there, youse." The giant gave Shea a cuff that almost knocked him flat and set him staggering toward the cell which Stegg had opened. Shea avoided the mass of corruption at one side and looked for a place to sit down. There was none. The only furnishings of any kind consisted of a bucket whose purpose was obvious.

Heimdall followed him in, still wearing his high, imperturbable air. Stegg gathered up the corpse, went out, and slammed the door. The giant took hold of the bars and heaved on them. There was no visible lock or bolt, but the door stayed tight.

"Oh, ho!" roared the giant. "Don't the Sleepless One look cute? When we get through with the other Aesir we'll come back and show youse some fun. Have yourselves a time." With

this farewell, the giants all tramped out.

Fortunately the air was warm enough so Shea didn't mind the loss of his garments from a thermal point of view. Around them the dungeon was silent, save for a drip of water somewhere and the occasional rustle of a prisoner in his cell. Across from Shea there was a clank of chains. An emaciated figure with a wildly disordered beard shuffled up to the bars and screamed, "Yngvi is a louse!" and shuffled back again.

"What means he?" Heimdall called out.

From the right came a muffled answer: "None knows. He says it every hour. He is mad, as you will be."

"Cheerful place," remarked Shea.

"Is it not?" agreed Heimdall readily. "Worse have I seen, but happily without being confined therein. I will say that for a mortal, you are not without spirit, Turnip Harald. Your demeanor likes me well."

"Thanks." Shea had not entirely forgotten his irritation over Heimdall's patronizing manner, but the Sleepless One held his interest more than the choleric and rather slow-witted Thor or the sneering Loki. "If you don't mind my asking, Golden One, why can't you just use your powers to get out?"

"To all things there is a limit," replied Heimdall, "of size, of power, and of duration. Wide is the lifetime of a god; wider than of a thousand of your feeble species one after the other. Yet even gods grow old and die. Likewise, as to these fire giants and their chief, Surt, that worst of beings, I have not much strength. If my brother Frey were here now, or if we were among the frost giants, I could overcome the magic of that door."

"How do you mean?"

"It has no lock. Yet it will not open save when an authorized person pulls it and with intent to open. Look, now"—Heimdall pushed against the bars without effect—"if you will be quiet for a while, I will try to see my way out of this place."

THE SLEEPLESS ONE leaned back against the wall, his eyes moving restlessly about, his body seeming to quiver with energy in spite of his relaxed position.

"Not too well can I see," he announced after a few minutes. "There is so much magic here—fire magic of a kind both evil and difficult—that it hurts my head. Yet this much I see clearly: around us all is rock, with no entrance but the way by which we came. Beyond that there lies a passage with trolls to watch it. *Ugh,* disgusting creatures." The golden-haired god gave a shudder of repugnance.

"Can you see beyond?" asked Shea.

"A little. Beyond the rolls, a ledge sits over a pile of molten slag at the entrance of the hall where the flaming swords are forged, and then—and then"—his forehead contracted, his lips moved a trifle—"a giant sits by the pool of slag. No more can I see."

Heimdall relapsed into gloomy silence. Shea felt considerable respect and some liking for him, but it is hard to be friendly with a god, even in a prison cell. Thjalfi's cheerful human warmth was missing.

Stegg re-entered the cell hall. One of the prisoners called out: "Good Stegg, a little water, please; I die of thirst."

Stegg turned his head a trifle. "Dinner time soon, slave." The prisoner gave a yell of anger and shouted abuse at the troll, who continued down to his alcove in the most per-

fect indifference. Here he hoisted himself into a broken-down chair, dropped his chin on his chest, and apparently went to sleep.

"Nice guy," said Shea.

The prisoner across the way came to the front of his cell and shrieked, "Yngvi is a louse!" again.

"The troll is not asleep," said Heimdall. "I can hear his thoughts, for he is of a race that can hardly think at all without moving the lips. But I cannot make them out. Harald, you see a thing that is uncommon; namely, one of the Aesir confessing he is beaten. But there is this to be said; if we are held here it will be the worst of days for gods and men."

"Why would that be?"

"So near is the balance of strength, gods against giants, that the issue of what will happen at the *Time* hangs by a thread. If we come late to the field we shall surely lose; the giants will hold the issues against our mustering. And I am here—here in this cell—with my gift of eyesight that can see them in time to warn. I am here, and the Gjallarhorn, the roaring trumpet that would call gods and heroes to the field is at Sverre's house."

He began to pace back and forth with rapid steps, his forehead set in a frown. Shea noted that even at this moment the Sleepless One was careful to place one foot before the other to best display the litheness of his walk.

"Surely they'll miss you," said Shea. "Can't they set other guards to watch the giants get together, or"—he finished lamely at the glint in Heimdall's eye—"something?"

"A mortal's thoughts! Aye!" Heimdall gave a short bark of bitter laughter. "Set other guards, here and there! Listen, Turnip Harald; Harald the fool. Of all us Aesir, Frey is the best, the only one who can stand before Surt with weapons in hand. Yet the worlds are so made, and we cannot change it, that one race Frey fears. Against the frost giants he has no power. Only I, I and my sword Head, can deal with them; and if I am not there to lead my band against the frost giants, we shall live to something less than a ripe old age thereafter."

"I'm sorry—sir," said Shea, the last word leaping to his lips unbidden.

"Aye. No matter. Come, let us play the game of questions. Few and ill are the thoughts that rise from brooding."

For hours they plied each other with queries about their respective worlds. In that ominous place, time could be measured only by meals and the periodic shrieks of "Yngvi is a louse!" About the eighth of these cries, Stegg came out of his somnolent state, went out, and returned with a pile of bowls. These he set in front of the cells. Each bowl had a spoon; one was evidently expected to do one's eating through the bars. As the troll put the bowls in front of Shea's cell, he remarked loftily: "King see subjects eat."

The mess he put in them consisted of some kind of porridge with small lumps of fish in it, sour to the taste. Shea did not blame his fellow prisoners when they broke into loud complaints about the quality and quantity of the food. Stegg paid not the slightest attention, relapsing into his chair till they had finished, when he gathered up the bowls and carried them out.

The next time the door opened, it was not Stegg but another troll. In the flickering torchlight this one was, if possible, less handsome than his predecessor. His face was built

around a nose of such astonishing proportions that it projected a good eighteen inches, and he moved with a quick, catlike stride. The prisoners, who had been fairly noisy while Stegg was in charge, now fell silent.

The new jailer stepped quickly to Shea's cell. "You new arrivals?" he snapped. "I am Snögg. You be good, nothing hurt you. You be bad, *zzzp*." He made a motion with his finger to indicate the cutting of a throat, and turning his back on them, paced down the row of cells, peering suspiciously into each.

Shea had never in his life slept on a stone floor. So he was surprised, an indefinite time later, to awaken and discover that he had done it for the first time, with the result of being stiff.

He got up, stretching. "How long have I been asleep?" he asked Heimdall.

"I do not know that. Our fellow prisoner, who dislikes someone called Yngvi, ceased his shouting some time since."

The long-nosed jailer was still pacing. Still muzzy with sleep Shea could not remember his name, and called out: "Hey, you with the nose! How long before breakf—"

The troll had turned on him, shrieking: "What you call me? You stinking worm! I—*zzzp!*" He ran down to the alcove, face distorted with fury, and returned with a bucket of water which he sloshed into Shea's surprised face. "You son of unwed parents!" raged he. "I roast you with slow fire! I am Snögg. I am master! You use right name."

Heimdall was laughing silently at the back of the cell.

Shea murmured: "That's one way of getting a bath at all evenings. I guess our friend Snögg is sensitive about his nose."

"That is not un-evident," said Heimdall. "Hai! How many troubles the children of men would save themselves, could they but have the skill of the gods for reading the thought that lies behind the lips. Half of all they suffer, I would wager."

"Speaking of wagers, Sleepless One," said Shea, "I see how we can run a race to pass the time."

"This cage is somewhat less than spacious," objected Heimdall. "What are you doing? It is to be trusted that you do not mean an eating race with those cockroaches."

"No. I'm going to race *them*. Here's yours. You can tell him by his broken feeler."

"The steed is not of the best breed," observed Heimdall, taking the insect. "Still, I will name him Gold Top, after my horse. What will you call yours, and how shall we race them?"

Shea said: "I shall call mine Man o' War after a famous horse in our world." He smoothed down the dust on the floor, and drew a circle in it with his finger. "Now," he explained, "let us release our racers in the center of the circle, and the one whose roach crosses the rim first shall win."

"A good sport. What shall the wager be? A crown?"

"Seeing that neither of us has any money at all," said Shea, "why don't we shoot the works and make it fifty crowns?"

"Five hundred if you wish."

Man o' War won the first race. Snögg, hearing the activity in the cell, hustled over. "What you do?" he demanded. Shea explained. "Oh," sniffed the troll. "All right, you do. Not too noisy, though. I stop if you do." He stalked away, but was soon back again to watch the sport. Gold Top won the second race—Man o' War the third and fourth. Shea,

glancing up, suppressed an impulse to tweak the sesquipedelian nose that the troll had thrust through the bars.

By and by Snögg went out and was replaced by Stegg, who did not even notice the cockroach-racing. As he hoisted himself into his chair, Shea asked whether he could get them some sort of small box or basket.

"Why you want?" asked Stegg.

Shea explained he wanted it to keep the cockroaches in.

Stegg raised his eyebrows. "I too big for this things," he said loftily and refused to answer another word.

So they had to let the racers go rather than hold them in their hands all day. But Shea saved a little of his breakfast and later, by using it as bait, they captured two more cockroaches.

This time, after a few victories for Shea, Heimdall's roach began to win consistently. By the time the man across the passage had yelled "Yngvi is a louse!" four times Shea found himself Heimdall's debtor to the extent of something like thirty million crowns. It made him suspicious. He watched the golden god narrowly during the next race, then burst out: "Say, that's not fair! You're fixing my cockroach with your eye and slowing him up!"

"What, mortal! Dare you accuse one of the Aesir?"

"You're damn right, I dare! If you're going to use your special powers, I won't play."

A smile slowly spread across Heimdall's face. "Young Harald, you do not lack for boldness, and I have said before you show glimmerings of wit. In truth, I have slowed up your steed; it is not meet that one of the Aesir should be beaten at aught by a mortal. But come, let that one go, and we will begin again with new mounts, for I fear that animal of yours will never again be the same."

It was not difficult to catch more roaches. "Once more I shall name mine Gold Top, after my horse," said Heimdall. "It is a name of good luck. Did you have no favorite horse?"

"No, but I had a car, a four-wheeled chariot. It was called—" began Shea, and then stopped. What was the name of that car? He tried to reproduce the syllables—nyrose, no—neelose, no, not that, either—neroses, nerosis—something clicked into place in his brain, a series of somethings, like the fragments of a jigsaw puzzle.

"Heimdall!" he cried suddenly, "I believe I know how we can get out of here!"

XI.

"THAT will be the best of news," said the Sleepless One, doubtfully, "if the deed be equal to the thought. But I have looked, now, deeply into this place, and I do not see how it may be done without outside aid. Nor shall we have help from any giant with the *Time* so near."

"Whose side will the trolls be on?"

"It is thought that the trolls will be neuter. Yet strange it would be if we could beguile one of these surly ones to help us."

"Nevertheless, something you said a little while back gives me an idea. You remember? Something about the skill of the gods at reading the thought that lies behind the lips?"

"Aye."

"I am—I was—of a profession whose business it is to learn people's thoughts by questioning them, and by studying what they think today, predict what they will think tomorrow in other circumstances. Even to provoke them to thinking certain things."

"It could be. It is an unusual art,

mortal, and a great skill, but it could be. What then?"

"Well, then, this Stegg, I don't think we can get far with him. I've seen his type before. He's a—a—a something I can't remember, but he lives in a world of his own imaginings, where he's a king and we're all his slaves. I remember, now—a paranoiac. You can't establish contact with a mind like that."

"Most justly and truly reasoned, Harald. From what I am able to catch of his thought this is no more than the truth."

"But Snögg is something else. We can do something with him."

"Much though I regret to say it, you do not drown me in an ocean of hope. Snögg is even more hostile than his unattractive brother."

Shea grinned. At last he was in a position to make use of his specialized knowledge. "That's what one would think. But I have studied many like him. The only thing that's wrong with Snögg is that he has a . . . a feeling of inferiority—a complex we called it—about that nose of his. If somebody could convince him he's handsome—"

"Snögg handsome! Ho, ho! That is a jest for Loki's tongue."

"*Sssh!* Please, Lord Heimdall. As I say, the thing he wants most is probably good looks. If we could . . . if we could pretend to work some sort of spell on his nose, tell him it has shrunk and get the other prisoners to corroborate—"

"A plan of wit! It is now to be seen that you have been associating with Uncle Fox. Yet do not sell your bearskin till you have caught the animal. If you can get Snögg sufficiently friendly to propose your plan, then will it be seen whether confinement has really sharpened your wits or only addled them. But, youngling, what is to prevent Snögg feeling his nose and discovering the beguilement for himself?"

"Oh, we don't have to guarantee to take it all off. He'd be grateful enough for a couple of inches."

When Snogg came on duty at nightfall, he found the dungeon as usual, except that Shea's and Heimdall's cell was noisy with shouts of encouragement to their entries in the great cockroach derby. He went over to the cell to make sure that nothing outside the rules of the prison was going on.

Shea met his suspicious glower with a grin. "Hi, there, friend Snögg! Yesterday, I owed Heimdall thirty million crowns, but today my luck has turned and it's down to twenty-three million."

"What do you mean?" snapped the troll.

Shea explained, and went on: "Why don't you get in the game? We'll catch a roach for you. It must be pretty dull, with nothing to do all night but listen to the prisoners snore."

"Hm-m-m," said Snögg, then turned abruptly suspicious again. "You make trick to let other prisoner escape, I—*zzzzp!*" He motioned across his throat again. "Lord Surt, he say."

"No, nothing like that. You can make your inspections any time. *Sssh!* There's one now."

"One what?" asked Snögg, a little of the hostility leaving his voice. Shea was creeping toward the wall of his cell. He pounced like a cat and came up with another cockroach in his hand. "What'll his name be?" he asked Snögg.

Snögg thought, his little troll brain trying to grasp the paradox of a friendly prisoner, his eyes moving suspiciously. "I call him Fjörm,

after river. That run fast," he said at last.

"That where you are from?"

"Aye."

Heimdall spoke up. "It is said, friend Snögg, that Fjörm has the finest fish in all the nine worlds, and I believe it, for I have seen them."

The troll looked almost pleased. "True word. Me fish there, early morning. Ho, ho! Me wade—snap! Up come trout. Bite him, flop, flop in face. Me remember big one, chase into shallow."

Shea said: "You and Oku-Thor ought to get together. Fjörm may have the best fish, but he has the biggest fish story in the nine worlds."

Snögg actually emitted a snicker. "Me know that story. Thor no fisher. He use hook and line. Only trolls know how to fish fair. We use hands, like this." He bent over the floor, his face fixed in an expression of intense concentration, then made a sudden sweeping motion, quick as a rattlesnake's lunge. "Ah!" he cried. "Fish! I love him! Come, we race."

The three cockroaches were tossed into the center of the circle and scuttled away. Snögg's Fjörm was the first to cross the line, to the troll's unconcealed delight.

They ran race after race, with halts when one of the roaches escaped and another had to be caught. Snögg's entry showed a tendency to win altogether at variance with the law of probability. The troll did not notice and would hardly have grasped the fact that Heimdall was using his piercing glance on his own and Shea's roaches and slowing them up, though Snögg was not allowed to win often enough to rouse his sleeping suspicions. By the time Stegg relieved him in the morning he was over twenty million crowns ahead. Shea stretched out on the floor to sleep with the consciousness of a job well done.

When he awoke, just before Snögg came on duty the next night, he found Heimdall impatient and uneasy, complaining of the delay while Surt's messenger was riding to demand the sword Head as ransom. Yet it speedily became obvious that the Snögg campaign could not be hurried.

"Don't you ever get homesick for your river Fjörm?" asked Shea, when the troll had joined them.

"Aye," replied Snögg. "Often. Like 'um fish."

"Think you'll be going back?"

"Will not be soon."

"Why not?"

Snögg squirmed a little. "Lord Surt, him hard master."

"Oh, he'd let you go. Is that the only reason?"

"N-no. Me like troll girl Elvagevu. Haro! Here, what I do, talk privacy life with prisoner? Stop it! We race."

Shea recognized this as a good place to stop his questioning, but when Snögg was relieved, he remarked to Heimdall: "That's a rich bit of luck. I can't imagine being in love with a female troll, but he evidently is—"

"Man from another world, you observe well. His thoughts were near enough his lips for me to read. This troll wife, Elvagevu, has refused him because of the size of his nose."

"Ah! Then we really have something. Now, tonight—"

When the cockroach races began that night, Heimdall reversed the usual process sufficiently to allow Snögg to lose several races in succession. The long winning streak he later developed was accordingly appreciated, and it was while Snögg was chuckling over his victories,

snapping his finger joints and bouncing in delight that Shea insinuated softly: "Friend Snögg, you have been good to us. Now, if there's something we could do for you, we'd be glad to do it. For instance, we might be able to remove the obstacle that prevents your return to Elvagevu."

Snögg jumped and glared suspiciously. "Not possible!" he said thickly.

Heimdall looked at the ceiling. "Great wonders have been accomplished by prisoners," he said, "when there is held out to them the hope of release."

"Lord Surt him very bad man when angry," Snögg countered, his eyes moving restlessly, though his bearing indicated he was not altogether unreceptive.

"Aye," nodded Heimdall. "Yet not Lord Surt's arm is long enough to reach into the troll country—after one who has gone there to stay with his own troll wife."

Snögg cocked his head on one side, so that he took on an absurd resemblance to some large-beaked bird. "Hard part is," he countered, "to get beyond Lord Surt's arm. Too much danger."

"But," said Shea, falling into the spirit of the discussion, "if one's face were altogether changed by the removal of a feature, it might be much easier and simpler. One would not be recognized."

Snögg caressed his enormous nose. "Too big— You make fun of me!" he snapped with sudden suspicion.

"Not at all," said Shea. "Back in my own country a girl once turned me down because my eyes were too close together. Women always have peculiar taste."

"That true." Snögg lowered his voice till it was barely audible. "You fix nose, I be your man; I do all for you."

"I don't want to guarantee too much in advance," said Shea. "But I think I can do something for you. I landed here without all my magic apparatus, though."

"All you need I get," said Snögg, eager to go the whole way now that he had committed himself.

"I'll have to think about what I need," said Shea.

The next day, when Stegg had collected the breakfast bowls, Shea and Heimdall lifted their voices and asked the other prisoners whether they would co-operate in the proposed method of escape. They answered readily enough. "Sure, if 'twon't get us into no trouble." "Aye, but will ye try to do something for me, too?" "Mought, if ye can manage it quiet." *"Yngvi is a louse!"*

Shea turned his thoughts to the concoction of a spell that would sound sufficiently convincing, doing his best to recall Chalmers' description of the laws of magic to which he had given so little attention when the professor stated them. There was the law of contagion—no, there seemed no application for that. But the law of similarity? That would be it. The troll, himself familiar with spells and wizardry, would recognize an effort to apply that principle as in accordance with the general laws of magic. It remained, then, to surround some application of the law of similarity with sufficient hocus-pocus to make Snögg believe something extra-special in the way of spells was going on. By their exclamation over the diminishing size of Snögg's nose the other prisoners would do the rest.

"Whom should one invoke in working a spell of this kind?" Shea asked Heimdall.

"Small is my knowledge of this petty mortal magic," replied Heimdall. "The Evil Companion would be able to give you all manner of spells and gewgaws. But I would say that the names of the ancestors of wizardry would be not without power in such cases."

"And who are they?"

"There is the ancestor of all witches, by name Witolf; the ancestor of all warlocks, who was called Willharm. Svarthead was the first of the spell singers, and of the giant kindred Ymir. For good luck and the beguiling of Snögg you might add two who yet live—Andvari, king of the dwarfs, and the ruler of all trolls, who is the Old Woman of Ironwood. She is a fearsome creature, but I think not unpleasant to one of her subjects."

When Snogg showed up again Shea had worked out his method for the phony spell. "I shall need a piece of beeswax," he said, "and a charcoal brazier already lit and burning; a piece of driftwood sawn into pieces no bigger than your thumb; a pound of green grass, and a stand on which you can balance a board just over the brazier."

Snögg said: "*Time* comes very near. Giants muster— When you want things?"

Shea heard in the background Heimdall's gasp of dismay at the first sentence. But he said: "As soon as you can possibly get them."

"Maybe tomorrow night. We race?"

"No—yes," said Heimdall. His lean, sharp face looked strained in the dim light. Shea could guess the impatience that was gnawing him, with his exalted sense of personal duty and responsibility. And perhaps with reason, Shea assured himself. The fate of the world, of gods and men, in Heimdall's own words, hung on that trumpet blast. Shea's own fate, too, hung on it—an idea he could never contemplate without a sense of shock and unreality, no matter how frequently he repeated the process of reasoning it all out.

Yet not even the shock of this repeated thought could stir him from the fatalism into which he had almost unconsciously fallen. The world he had come from, uninteresting though it was, had at least been something one could grasp, think over as a whole. Here he felt himself a chip on a tossing ocean of strange and terrible events. His early failures on the trip to Jötunheim had left him with a sense of complete helplessness which had not entirely disappeared even with his success in detecting the illusions in the giants' games and the discovery of Thor's hammer. Loki then, and Heimdall later had praised his fearlessness—ha, he said to himself, if they only knew! It was not true courage that animated him, but a feeling that he was involved in a kind of strange and desperate game, in which the only thing that mattered was to play it as skillfully as possible. He supposed soldiers had something of that feeling in battle. Otherwise, they would all run away and—

His thoughts strayed again to the episode in the hall of Utgard. Was it Loki's spell or the teardrop in his eye that accounted for his success there—in the discovery of Mjöllnir and the illusions of the games? Or merely the trained observation of a modern mind? Some of the last, certainly; the others had been too excited to note such discordant details as the fact that Hugi cast no shadow. At the same time, his modern mind balked over the idea that the spell had been effective. Yet

there was something—something, a residue of phenomenon, not accounted for by physical fact. That meant that, given the proper spell to work, he could perform as good a bit of magic as the next *man*. Heimdall, Snögg, and Surt all had special powers—built in during construction as it were—but their methods would do him, Shea, no good at all. He was neither god, troll—thank Heaven!—nor giant.

Well, if he couldn't be a genuine warlock, he could at least put on a good show. He thought of the little poses and affectations he had put on during his former life. Now that life itself depended on how well he could assume a pose. How would a wizard act? He gave over the question with the realization that his normal behavior would seem odd enough to Snögg for all practical purposes.

The inevitable night dragged out, and Stegg arrived to take over his duties. Snögg hurried out. Shea managed to choke down what was sardonically described as his breakfast and tried to sleep. The first yell of "Yngvi is a louse!" brought him up all standing. And his flea-bites seemed to itch more than usual. He had just gotten himself composed when it was time for dinner again and Snögg.

The troll listened, twitching with impatience, till Stegg's footfall died away. Then he scurried out like a magnified rat and returned with his arms full of the articles Shea had ordered. He dumped them in the middle of the passage and with a few words opened the door of Shea's and Heimdall's cell.

"Put out all but one of the torches," said Shea. While Snögg was doing this the amateur magician went to work. Holding the beeswax over the brazier, he softened it enough to work and pressed it into conical shape, making two deep indentations on one side till it was a crude imitation of Snögg's proboscis.

"Now," he whispered to the pop-eyed troll, "get the water bucket. When I tell you, pour it into the brazier."

Shea knelt before the brazier and blew into it. The coals brightened. He picked up a fistful of the driftwood chips and began feeding them onto the glowing charcoal. They caught, little varicolored flames dancing across them. Shea, on his haunches and swaying to and fro, began his spell:

"Witolf and Willharm,
Stand, my friends!
Andvari, Ymir,
Help me to my ends!
The Hag of the Ironwood
Shall be my aid;
By the spirit of Svarthead,
Let this spell be made!"

The beeswax, on the board above the brazier, was softening. Slowly the cone lost its shape and slumped. Transparent drops trickled over the edge of the board, hung redly in the glow, and dropped with a hiss and spurt of yellow flame into the brazier.

Shea chanted:

"Let wizards and warlocks
Combine and conspire
To make Snögg's nose melt
Like the wax on this fire!"

The beeswax had become a mere fist-shaped lump. The trickle into the brazier was continuous; little flames rose yellowly and were reflected from the eyes of the breathlessly watching prisoners.

Shea stuffed handfuls of grass into the brazier. Thick rolls of smoke filled the dungeon. He moved his arms through the murk, wriggling the fingers and shouting:

"Hag of the Ironwood, I invoke you in the name of your subject!"

The waxen lump was tiny now. Shea leaned forward into the smoky half-light, his eyes smarting, and rapidly molded it into something resembling the shape of an ordinary nose. "Pour, now!" he cried. *Swoosh!* went the water into the brazier, and everything was blotted from vision by a cloud of vapor.

He struggled away and to an erect position. Sweat was making little furrows in the dirt along his skin, with the sensation of insects crawling. "All right," he said. "You can put the lights back on now." The next few seconds would tell whether his deception was going to work. If the other prisoners did not fail him—

Snögg was going along the passage, lighting the extinguished torches from the one that remained. As the light increased and he turned to place one in its bracket on the opposite side of the wall, Shea joined involuntarily in the cry of astonishment that rose from every prisoner in the cells.

Snögg's nose was no bigger than that of a normal human being.

Harold Shea *was* a warlock.

"Head feel funny," remarked Snögg in a matter-of-fact tone.

XII.

The troll put the last torch in place and turned to Shea, caressing the new nose with a scaly hand. "Very good magic, Harald Warlock!" he said, chuckling and dancing a couple of steps. "Hai! Elvagevu, you like me now!"

Shea stood rooted, trying to absorb events that seemed to have rushed past him. The only sound he could utter was "Guk!"

He felt Heimdall's hand on his shoulder. "Well and truly was that spell cast," said the Sleepless One. "Much profit may we have from it. Yet I should warn you, warlock, that it is ill to lie to the gods. Why did you tell me, at the Crossroads of the World, that you had no skill in magic?"

"Oh," said Shea, unable to think of anything else, "I guess I'm just naturally modest. I didn't wish to presume before you, sir."

Snögg had gone off into a ludicrous hopping dance around the hall. 'Beautiful me!" he squealed. "Beautiful me!"

Shea thought that Snögg, with or without nose, was about the ugliest thing he had ever seen. But there seemed little point in mentioning the fact. Instead, he asked, "How about getting us out of here now, friend Snögg?"

Snögg moderated his delight enough to say: "Will be do. Go your cage now. I come with clothes and weapon."

Shea and Heimdall exchanged glances. It seemed hard to go back into that tiny cell, but they had to trust the troll now, so they went.

"Now it remains to be seen," said Heimdall, "whether that scaly fish eater has betrayed us. If he has—" He let his voice trail off.

"We might consider what we could do to him if he has," grinned Shea. His astonishing achievement had boosted his morale to the skies.

"Little enough could I accomplish in this place of fire magic," said Heimdall, gloomily, "but such a warlock as yourself could make his legs sprout into serpents."

"Maybe," said Shea. He couldn't get used to the idea that he, of all people, could work magic. It was contrary to the laws of physics, chemistry and biology. But then, where he was and for him the laws of physics, chemistry and biology

With a pleased and comforted grin, Thor fitted the hammer into his hands and started to collect giants—

had been repealed. He was under the laws of magic. His spell had conformed exactly to those laws, as explained by Dr. Chalmers. This was a world in which those laws were basic. The trick was that he happened to know one of those laws, while the general run of mortals—

and trolls and gods, too!—didn't know them. Naturally, the spells would seem mysterious to them, just as the changing color of two combined chemicals was mysterious to anyone who didn't know chemistry. If he had only provided himself with a more elaborate knowledge of those laws instead of the useless flashlights, matches, and guns—

A tuneless whistle cut across his thoughts. It was Snögg, still beaming, carrying a great bundle of clothes and something long.

"Here clothes, lords," he grinned, the tendrils on his head writhing in a manner that no doubt indicated well-being, but which made Shea's skin crawl. "Here swords, too. I carry till we outside, yes?" He held up a length of light chain. "You put round wrists, I lead you. Anybody stop, I say going to Lord Surt."

"Hurry, Harald," said Heimdall, as Shea struggled into the unfamiliar garments. "There is yet hope, though it grows dim, that we may reach the other Aesir before they give my sword away."

Shea was dressed. He and Heimdall took the middle and end of the chain, while Snögg tucked the other end in his belt and strode importantly before them, a huge sword in either hand. They were as big as Hundingsbana, but with plain hilts and rust-spotted blades. The troll seemed to carry them without perceptible effort.

Snögg opened the door at the end of the dungeon. "Now you keep quiet," he said. "I say I take you to Surt. Look down, you much abused."

One of the prisoners called softly, "Good luck go with you, friends, and do not forget us." Then they were outside, shambling along the gloom of the tunnel. Shea hunched his shoulders forward and assumed as discouraged an expression as he could manage with his triumphantly beating heart.

THEY PASSED a recess in the tunnel wall, where sat four trolls. Their tridents leaned beside them, and they were playing the game of odds-and-evens with their fingers. One of the four got up and called out something in troll language. Snögg responded in the same tongue, adding: "Lord Surt want."

The troll looked dubious. "One guard not enough. Maybe they get away."

Snögg rattled the chain. "Not this. Spell on this chain. *Goinn alm-sorg thjalma.*"

The troll seemed satisfied with the explanation and returned to his sport. The three stumbled on through the dimness past a big room hewn out of the rock, full of murky light and motion. Shea jumped as someone—a man from the voice—screamed, a long, high scream that ended with gasps of "Don't . . . don't . . . don't." There was only a glimpse of what was going on, but enough to turn the stomach. For the first time Shea found himself genuinely hating the giants.

The passage ended in a ledge below which boiled a lake of molten lava. Beside the ledge sat a giant with one of the flaming swords. As he looked up, his eyes were pits beneath the eyebrow ridges.

Snögg said: "Prisoners go to Lord Surt. Orders."

The giant peered at them. "Say," he said, "ain't you the troll Snögg? What happened to your nose?"

"I pray Old Woman of Ironwood. She shrink him!" Snögg grinned.

"O. K., I guess it's all right." As they passed, the giant thrust a foot in front of Shea, who promptly stumbled over it, in sickening fear

of going down into the lava. The giant thundered, "Haw, haw, haw!"

"You be careful," snapped Snögg. "You push prisoner in, Surt push you in, by Ymir."

"Haw, haw, haw! Ga-wan, Scaly-face, before I push you in."

Shea picked himself up, giving the giant a look that should have melted lead at twenty paces. If he could remember that face and sometime—but, no, he was romancing. Careful, Shea, don't let things go to your head.

They turned from the ledge into another tunnel. This sloped up then leveled again where side tunnels branched in from several directions. Snögg picked his way unerringly through the maze. A tremendous banging grew on them, and they were passing the entrance of some kind of armory. The limits of the place were invisible in the flickering red glare, through which scuttled naked black things, like licorice dolls. Heimdall whispered: "These would be dark dwarfs from Svartaalfheim, where no man nor Asa has ever been."

They went on, up, right, left. A sultry glow came down the tunnel ahead, as though a locomotive were approaching around the curve. There was a tramp of giant feet. Around the corner came a file of the monsters, each with a flaming sword, marching and looking straight ahead, like somnambulists. The three flattened themselves against the wall as the file tramped past, their strench filling the passage. The rearmost giant fell out and turned back.

"Prisoners to Lord Surt," said Snögg. The giant nodded, cleared his throat and spat. Shea got it in the neck. He retched slightly and swabbed with the tail of his cloak as the giant grinned and hurried after the rest.

They were in the upper part of the stronghold now, moving through forests of pillars. Snögg abandoned his bold stride, put a finger to his lips and began to slide softly from pillar to pillar. The tread of a giant resounded somewhere near. All three squeezed themselves into a triangle of shadow behind a pillar. The footsteps waxed, stopping just on the opposite side, and all three held breath. They heard the giant hawk, then spit, and the little *splat!* on the floor. The footsteps moved off.

"Give me chain," whispered Snögg. He rolled it into a tight ball, and led the way, tiptoeing, into another maze of passages. "This is way," he whispered, after a few minutes. "We wait till passage clear. Then I go, make giant chase. Then you go, run fast. Then—*ssst!* Lie down on floor, quick!"

They fell flat at the word, next to the wall. Shea felt the floor vibrate beneath him to the tread of invisible giants. They were coming nearer, toward them, right over them, and the sound of their feet was almost drowned for Shea in the beating of his own heart. He shut his eyes. One of the giants rumbled heavily: "So I says to him, 'Whassa matter, ain'tcha got no guts?' And he says—" The rest of the remark was carried away.

The three rose and tiptoed. Snögg motioned them to stop, peering around a corner. Shea recognized the passage by which they had entered the place—how long before? Snögg took one more peek, turned and handed Shea one sword, giving the other to Heimdall. "When giant chase me," he whispered, "run; run fast. Dark outside. You hide."

"How will you find us?" asked Shea.

Snögg's grin was visible in the

gloom. "Never mind. I find you all right. You bet." He was gone.

SHEA AND HEIMDALL waited. They heard a rumbling challenge from the sentry and Snögg's piping reply. A chain clanked, the sound suddenly drowned in a frightful roar. "Why, you snooty little—" Feet pounded into the night, and shoutings.

Shea and Heimdall raced for the entrance and out past the door, which swung ajar. It was blacker than the inside of a cow, except where dull-red glows lit the under sides of smoke plumes from vents in the cones.

They headed straight out and away, Shea, at least, with no knowledge of where they were going. It would be time enough to think of direction later, anyway. They had to walk rather than run, even when their eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, and even so narrowly missed a couple of bad falls on the fantastically contorted rock.

The huge cone of Surt's stronghold faded into the general blackness behind. Then there was a hiss in the dark and they were aware of Snögg's fishy body smell. The troll moved light and sure, like a cat. He was chuckling. "Hit giant in nose with chain. Should see face. He, he, he!"

"Whither do you lead us, troll?" asked Heimdall.

"Where you want to go?"

Heimdall thought. "The best would be Sverre's house, the Crossroads of the World. Or failing that, the gates of hell, where one may hope to find even yet the Wanderer at his task. He must know, soon as ever, what we have seen. That were a fortnight's journey afoot. But if I could get to some high cold place, where this fire magic is not, I could call my horse, Gold Top."

"Look out!" said Snögg suddenly. "Giants come!"

A flickering yellow light was showing across the lava beds. Snögg vanished into a patch of shadow, while Shea and Heimdall crouched under the edge of a dyke in the lava flow. They heard the crunch of giant feet on the basalt. The shadows swayed this way and that with the swinging of the fiery swords. A giant voice rumbled. "Hey, youse, this is a rough section. There's enough pockets to hide fifty prisoners."

Another voice: "O. K., O. K. I suppose we gotta poke around here all night. Me, I don't think they came this way, anyhow."

"You ain't supposed to think," retorted the first voice, nearer. "Hey, Raki!"

"Here," growled a third, more distant, giant.

"Don't get too far away," shouted the first.

"But the other guys are clear outta sight!" complained the distant Raki.

"That don't matter none. We gotta keep close together. Ouch!" The last was a yell, mixed with a thump and a scramble. "If I catch those scum, they'll pay for this."

THE LIGHT from the nearest giant's sword grew stronger, creeping toward Shea and Heimdall inch by inch. The fugitives pressed themselves against the rock at their backs as if they could push themselves right through it. Inch by inch—

The giant was clearly visible around the end of the lava dyke, holding his sword high and moving slowly, peering into every hollow. Nearer came the light. Nearer. It washed over the toes of Shea's boots, then lit up Heimdall's yellow mane.

"Hey!" roared the giant in his foghorn bass. "Raki! Randver! I

got 'em! Come, quick!" He rushed at a run. At the same time there was a thumping behind them and the nearest of the other two leaped up out of nowhere, swinging his sword in circles.

"Take that one, warlock!" barked Heimdall, pointing with his sword at the first of the two. He vaulted lightly to the top of the dyke and made for the second giant.

Shea hefted his huge blade with both hands. You simply couldn't fence with a crowbar like this. It was hopeless. But he wasn't afraid —hot dog, he wasn't afraid! What the hell, anyway? The giant gave a roar and a leap, whirling the fiery sword over his head in a figure eight to cut the little man down in one stroke.

Shea swung the ponderous weapon up in a half instinctive effort to parry that downstroke. He never knew how, but in that instant the sword went as light as an amusement-park cane. The blades met. With a tearing scream of metal Shea's sword sheared right through the flaming blade. The tip sailed over his head, landing with a crackle of flame in some brush behind. Almost without Shea's trying, his big blade swept around in a perfect stop-thrust in carte, and through the monster's throat. With a bubbling shriek the giant crashed to earth.

Shea spun around. Beyond the lip of the dyke Heimdall was hotly engaged with his big adversary, their blades flickering, but the third giant was coming up to take a part. Shea scrambled up on the dyke and ran toward him, surprised to discover he was shouting at the top of his voice.

The giant changed course and in no time was towering right over him. Shea easily caught the first slash with a simple parry carte. The giant hesitated, irresolute; Shea saw his chance, whipped both blades around in a bind in octave, and lunged. The giant's flaming sword was pushed back against its owner, and Shea's point took him in the stomach with such a rush that Shea almost fell onto the collapsing monster's body.

"Ho, ho!" cried Heimdall. He was standing over his fallen opponent, terrible bloody slashes in the giant's body showing dim red in the light of the burning swords on the ground. "Through the guts! Never have I seen a man who used a sword as he would a spear, thrust and not strike. By Thor's hammer, Warlock Harald, I had not expected to find you so good a man of your hands! I have seen those do worse who were called berserks and champions." He laughed, and tossed his own sword up to catch it by the hilt. "Surely you shall be of my band at the *Time*. Though in the end it is nothing remarkable, seeing what blade you have there."

The big sword had become heavy again and weighed Shea's arm down. There was a trickle of blood up over the hilt onto his hand. "Looks like a plain sword to me," he said.

"By no means. That is the enchanted sword, Frey's invincible Hundingsbana, that shall one day be Surt's death. Hai! Gods and men will shout for this day; for the last of the war weapons of the Aesir is recovered! But we must hurry. Snögg!"

"Here," said the troll, emerging from a clump of tree ferns. "Forgot to say. I put troll spell on him sword so light from blade don't show giants where we go. It wear off in a day or two."

"Can you tell us where there is a mountain tall and cold near here?" asked Heimdall.

"Is one—oh, many miles north.

Called Steinnbjörg. Walk three days."

"That is something less than good news," said Heimdall. "Already we have reached the seventh night since Thor's play with the giants of Jötunheim. By the length of his journey the Wanderer should tomorrow be at the gates of hell. We must seek him there; much depends on it."

Shea had been thinking furiously. After all, if he knew enough to be a warlock, why not use the knowledge? The laws of similarity and contagion—

"Can I get hold of a few brooms?" he demanded.

"Brooms? Strange are your desides, warlock of another world," said Heimdall.

"What you want him for?" asked Snögg.

"I may be able to work a magic trick."

XIII.

Snogg thought. "In thrall's house, two mile east, maybe brooms. Thrall he get sick, die."

"Lead on," said Shea.

They were off again through the darkness. Now and then they glimpsed a pinpoint of light in the distance, as some one of the other giant search parties moved about, but none approached them. The thrall's hut proved a crazy pile of basalt blocks chinked with moss. The door sagged ajar. Inside it was too black to see anything.

"Snögg," asked Shea, "can you take a little of the spell off this sword so we can have some light?"

He held it out. Snögg ran his hands up and down the blade, muttering. A faint golden gleam came from it, revealing a pair of brooms in one corner of the single-room hut. One was fairly new, the other an ancient wreck with most of the willow twigs that had composed it broken or missing.

"Now," he said, "I need the feathers of a bird. Preferably a swift, as that's about the fastest flier. There ought to be some around."

"On roof, I think," said Snögg. "You wait; I get." He slid out, and they heard him grunting and scrambling up the hut. Presently he was back with a puff of feathers in his scaly hand.

Shea had been working out the proper spell in his head, applying both the law of contagion and the law of similarity. Now he laid the brooms on the floor and brushed them gently with the feathers, chanting:

"Bird of the south, swift bird of the south,
Lend us your wings for a night.
Stir these brooms to movement, O bird of the south
As swift as your own and as light."

He tossed one of the feathers into the air and blew at it, so that it bobbed about without falling.

"Verdfölnir, greatest of hawks, I invoke you!" he cried. Catching the feather, he stooped, picking at the strings that held the broom till they were loosened, inserted the feathers in the broom, and made all tight again. Kneeling, he made what he hoped were mystic passes over the brooms, declaiming:

"Up, up, arise!
Bear us away;
We must be in the mountains
Before the new day."

"Now," he said, "I think we can get to your Steinnbjörg soon enough."

Snögg pointed to the brooms, which in that pale light seemed to be stirring with a motion of their own. "You fly through air?" he inquired.

"With the greatest of ease. If you want to come, I guess that new broom will carry two of us."

"Oh, no!" said Snögg, backing away. "No thank, by Ymir! I stay on ground, you bet. I go to Elvagevu on foot. Not break beautiful me. You not worry. I know way."

Snögg made a vague gesture that could have signified anything and slipped out the door. Heimdall and Shea followed him, the latter with the brooms. The sky was beginning to show its first touch of dawn. "Now, let's see how these broomsticks of ours work," said Shea.

"What is the art of their use?" asked Heimdall.

Shea hadn't the least idea. But he answered boldly. "Just watch me and imitate me," he said, and squatting over his broom, with the stick between his legs and Hundingsbana stuck through his belt, said:

> "By oak, ash, and yew
> The high airs through,
> We fly to Steinnbjörg
> Without more ado!"

The broom leaped up under him with a jerk that almost left its rider behind. Shea gripped the stick till his knuckles were white. Up—up—up he went, till everything was blotted out in the damp opaqueness of cloud. The broom rushed on at a steeper and steeper angle, till Shea found to his horror that it was rearing over backward. He wound his legs around the stick and clung, while the broom hung for a second suspended at the top of its loop with Shea dangling beneath. It dived, then fell over sidewise, spun this way and that, with its passenger flopping like a bell clapper.

THE DARK EARTH popped out from beneath the clouds and rushed up at him. Just as he was sure he was about to crash, he managed to swing himself around the stick. The broom darted straight ahead at frightening speed, then started to nose up again. Shea inched forward to shift his weight. The broom slowed up, teetered to a forty-five-degree angle and fell off into a spin. The black rock of Muspellheim whirled madly beneath. Shea leaned back, tugging up on the stick. The broom came out of it and promptly fell into another spin on the opposite side. Shea pulled it out of that, too, being careful not to give so much pressure this time. By now he was so dizzy he couldn't tell whether he was spinning or not.

For a few seconds the broom scudded along with a pitching motion like a porpoise with the itch. This was worse than Thor's chariot. Shea's stomach, always sensitive to such movements, failed him abruptly and he strewed Muspellheim with the remains of his last meal. Having accomplished this, he set himself grimly to the task of mastering his steed. He discovered that it had the characteristics of an airplane both longitudinally and laterally unstable. The moment it began to nose up, down, or sidewise the movement had to be corrected instantly and to just the right degree. But it could be managed.

A thin, drawn-out cry of "Haaaraaāld!" came to him. He had been so busy that he had had no time to look for Heimdall. A quarter mile to his right, the Sleepless One clung desperately to his broom, which was doing an endless series of loops, like an amusement park proprietor's dream of heaven.

Shea inched his own broom around a wide circuit. A hundred yards from Heimdall, the latter's mount suddenly stopped looping and veered straight at him. Heimdall seemed

helpless to avoid the collision, but Shea managed to pull up at the last minute, and Heimdall, yellow hair streaming, shot past underneath. Shea brought his own broom around, to discover that Heimdall was in a flat spin.

As his face came toward Shea, the latter noted it looked paler than he had ever seen it. The Asa called: "How to control this thing, oh, very fiend among warlocks?"

"Lean to your left!" shouted Shea. "When she dives, lean back far enough to level her out!" Heimdall obeyed, but overdid the lean-back and went into another series of loops. Shea yelled to shift his weight forward when the broom reached the bottom of the loop.

Heimdall overdid it again and took a wild downward plunge, but was grasping the principle of the thing and pulled out again. "Never shall we reach Odinn in time!" he shouted, pointing down. "Look, how already the hosts of Surt move toward Ragnarök!"

Shea glanced down at the tumbled plain. Sure enough, down there long files of giants were crawling over it, the flaming swords standing out like fiery particles against the black earth.

"Which way is this mountain?" he called back.

Heimdall pointed toward the left. "There is a high berg in that direction, I think; though still too strong is the fire magic for me to see clearly."

"Let's get above the clouds then. Ready?" Shea shifted back a little and they soared. Dark grayness gripped them, and he hoped he was keeping the correct angle. Then the gray paled to pearl, and they were out above an infinite sea of cloud, touched yellow by a rising sun.

Heimdall pointed. "Unquestionably Steinnbjörg lies yonder. Let us speed!"

Shea looked. He could make out nothing but one more roll of cloud, perhaps a little more solid than the others. They streaked toward it.

"THERE must be an arresting!" cried Heimdall, when they had circled an unquestionable snow-capped mountain three times at breathless speed.

"I'll have to use a spell," replied Shea. He swung back, chanting:

> "By oak, ash, and yew
> And heaven's dew,
> We have come to the Steinnbjörg;
> Land softly and true!"

The broomstick slowed down and Shea fishtailed it into an easy landing. Heimdall followed, but plowed deep into a snowdrift. He struggled out with hair and eyebrows all white, but with a literally flashing smile on his face. "Warlocks there have been, Harald, but never like you. I find your methods somewhat drastic."

"If you don't want that broom any more," Shea retorted, "I'll take it and leave this old one. I can use it."

"Take it, if it pleases your fancy. But now you, too, shall see a thing." He put both hands to his mouth and shouted. "Yo hoooo! Gulltop! Yo hooooo, Gulltop! Your master, Heimdall Odinnsson, calls!"

For a while nothing happened, as when Thor had called his hammer. Then Shea became aware of a shimmering, polychromatic radiance in the air about him. A rainbow was forming, and he in the center of it. But unlike most rainbows, this one was end-on. It extended slowly down to the very snow at their feet; the colors thickened and grew solid till they blotted out the snow and clouds

and crags behind them. Down the rainbow came trotting a gigantic white horse with a mane of bright metallic yellow. The animal stepped off the rainbow and nuzzled Heimdall's chest.

"Come," said Heimdall. "I grant you permission to ride with me, though you will have to sit behind. Mind you do not prick him with Hundingsbana."

Shea climbed aboard with his oddly assorted baggage of sword and broom. The horse whirled around and bounded onto the rainbow. It galloped fast, with a long reaching stride, but almost no sound, as though it were galloping across an endless feather bed. The wind whistled past Shea's ears with a speed he could only guess.

After an hour or two Heimdall turned his head. "Sverre's house lies below the clouds; I can see it."

The rainbow inclined downward, disappearing through the gray. For a moment they were wrapped in mist again, then out, and the rainbow, less vivid but still substantial enough to bear them, curved direct to the bonder's gate.

Gold Top stamped to a halt in the yard, slushy with melting snow. Heimdall leaped off and toward the door, where a couple of stalwart blonds stood as though on guard.

"Hey," called Shea after him. "Can't I get something to eat?"

"Time is wanting," shouted the Sleepless One over his shoulder, disappearing through the door, to return in a moment with horn and sword. He spoke a word or two to the men at the door, who ran around the house, and presently were visible leading out horses of their own.

"Heroes from Valhall," explained Heimdall, buckling on his baldric, "set to guard the Gjallarhorn while the negotiations for my release were going on." He snatched up the horn and vaulted to the saddle. The rainbow had changed direction, but lay straight away before them as Gold Top sprang into his stride again.

Shea asked: "Couldn't you just blow your horn now without waiting to see Odinn?"

"Not so, Warlock Harald. The Wanderer is lord of gods and men. None act without his permission. But I fear me it will come late—late." He turned his head. "Hark! Do you hear— Nay, you cannot. But my ears catch a sound which tells me the dog Garm is loose, that great monster."

"Why does it take Odinn so long to get to hell?" said Shea, puzzled.

"He goes in disguise, as you saw him on the moor, riding a common pony. The spae wife Grua is of the giant brood. Be sure she would refuse to advise him, or give him ill advice, did she recognize him as one of the Aesir."

Gold Top was up out of the clouds, riding the rainbow that seemed to stretch endlessly before. Shea could think only how many steaks one could get from the huge animal. He had never eaten horseflesh, but in his present mood was willing to try.

The sun was already low when they pierced the cloudbanks again. This time they dropped straight into swirls of snow. Beneath and then around them Shea could make out a ragged, gloomy landscape of sharp black pinnacles, too steep to gather drifts.

THE RAINBOW ended abruptly, and they were on a rough road that wound among the rock towers. Gold Top's hoofs *clop-clopped* sharply on frozen mud. The road wound tortuously, always downward into a great gorge, which reared up pillars and buttresses on either side. Snow-

flakes sank vertically through the still air around them, feathering the forlorn little patches of moss that constituted the only vegetation. Cold tore at them like a knife. Enormous icicles, like the trunks of elephants, were suspended all around. There was no sound but the tread of the horse and his quick breathing, which condensed in little vapor plumes around his nostrils.

Darker and darker it grew, colder and colder. Shea whispered—he did not know why, except that it seemed appropriate—"Is this hell of yours a cold place?"

"The coldest in the nine worlds," said Heimdall. "Now you shall pass me up the great sword, that I may light our way with it."

Shea did so. Ahead, all he could see over Heimdall's shoulder now was blackness, as though the walls of the gorge had shut them in above. Shea put out one hand as they scraped one wall of the chasm, then jerked it back. The cold of the rock bit through his mitten into his fingers like fire.

Gold Top's ears pricked forward in the light from the sword. They rounded a corner, and came suddenly on a spark of life in that gloomy place, lit by an eerie blue-green phosphorescence. Shea could make out in that half-light the tall, slouch-hatted figure of the Wanderer, and his pony beside him. There was a third figure, a human figure cloaked and hooded in black, its face invisible.

Odinn looked toward them as they approached. "Hai! Muginn brought me tidings of your captivity and your escape. The second was the better news," said the sonorous voice.

Heimdall and Shea dismounted. The Wanderer looked sharply at Shea. "Are you not that lost one I met near the crossroads?" he asked.

"It is none other," put in Heimdall, "and a warlock of power is he, as well as the briskest man with a sword that ever I saw. He is to be of my band. We have Hundingsbana and Head. Have you won that for which you came?"

"Enough, or near enough. Myself and Vidarr are to stand before the Sons of the Wolf, those dreadful monsters. Thor shall fight the Worm; Frey, Surt. Ullr and his men are to match the hill giants and you the frost giants, as already I knew."

"All father, you are needed. The dog Garm is loose and Surt is bearing the flaming sword from the south with the frost giants at his back. The *Time* is here."

"Aieeee!" screeched the black-shrouded figure. "I know ye now, Odinn! Woe the day that my tongue—"

"Silence, hag!" The deep voice seemed to fill that desolate place with thunder. "Blow, son of mine, then. Rouse our bands, for it is *Time*."

"Aieeee!" screeched the figure again. "Begone, accursed ones, to whatever place from whence ye came!" A hand shot out, and Shea noticed with a prickling of the scalp that it was fleshless. The hand seized a sprinkle of snow and threw it at Odinn. He laughed.

"Begone!" shrieked the spae wife, throwing another handful of snow, this time at Heimdall. His only reply was to set the great horn to his lips and take a deep breath.

"Begone, I say!" she screamed again. Shea had a bloodcurdling glimpse of a skull under the hood as she scooped up the third handful of snow. "To whatever misbegotten place ye came from!" The first notes of the roaring trumpet sang and swelled and filled all space in a tre-

mendous peal of martial, triumphant music. The rocks shook, and the icicles cracked, and Harold Shea saw the third handful of snow, a harmless little damp clot, flying at him from her fingers.

"WELL," said the detective. "I'm sorry you can't help me out no more than that, Professor Chalmers. We gotta notify his folks in St. Louis. We get these missing-person cases now and then, but we usually find 'em. You'll get his things together, won't you?"

"Certainly, certainly," said Reed Chalmers. "I thought I'd go over his papers now."

"O. K. Thanks. By, Professor Chalmers; by, Mr. Bayard. Be seein' you." The door closed.

"Why didn't you tell him what you think really happened?" asked Walter Bayard, lounging in Harold Shea's one good armchair.

"Because it would be—shall I say—somewhat difficult to prove. I do not propose to make myself a subject for public ridicule in the more sensational newspapers."

"Yes, there's something in that. You can prove the thing in one direction, but not the reverse. It'll be a little queer without—"

Wham! The outward rush of displaced air bowled Chalmers over, whipped a picture from the wall with a crash of glass, and sent the pile of Shea's papers flying. There may have been other minor damage as well. But neither Chalmers nor Bayard noticed it. In the middle of the room stood the subject of their talk, bareheaded, swathed in countless yards of blanketlike woolen garments. His face showed a distinct sun and wind tan. In his left hand he held a clumsily made broom of willow twigs.

"Hiya," said Shea, grinning at their expressions. "You two had dinner yet? Yeah? Well, you can come along and watch me eat." He tossed the broom in a corner. "Souvenir to go with my story. Useful while it lasted, but I'm afraid it won't work here."

"But," stammered Chalmers, "you aren't going out to a restaurant in that outfit?"

"Hell, yes. I'm hungry!"

"What will people think?"

"What the hell do I care?"

"Bless my soul," exclaimed Chalmers, and followed Shea out.

THE END.

If you like

UNKNOWN—

Maybe a friend would.

Try passing it on and let him see!

MAD HATTER

by WINSTON K. MARKS

The origin, no doubt, of the design of those things women call hats—

Illustrated by Don Hewitt

TRY as he might, Denis Alaric couldn't shut out the awful afternoon sunlight that slanted through the Venetian blinds he'd forgotten to close. He tried ducking under the covers, but it was too stuffy. When he covered his eyes with his arm, the intolerable weight of that member threatened to crush his skull.

Giving up slumber as a bad job, he turned to the next best idea. He jerked off his mangled pajamas and moved to the cluttered table. Under his drawing board he found what he wasn't looking for, an empty whiskey bottle. What he was looking for had irretrievably soaked itself into half a ream of drawing paper, three finished sketches and the intricate design of the Persian rug.

"Now who in hell knocked that over?" he demanded of the empty room. Empty room? So it should have been, for Denis Alaric was a confirmed bachelor, strictly recluse within the confines of his studio apartment. But empty the room was not.

"Perhaps I did it." At the voice Denis whirled in consternation. The wall opposite him sustained a massive, modernistic chest of drawers flanked on either side by a doorway, one leading to the kitchenette, the other to the bathroom. But sound simply didn't penetrate those noise-proof panels. Yet, from that direction, from that open drawer had come—

"Yes. Now that I think of it, I'm quite sure I did it, while I was deploring those terrible sketches of yours. Those dreadful sketches. I do hope I ruined them. Then you'll throw them away?" The soft little voice concluded with a hopeful lilt.

With a nervous agility seldom displayed by men turned forty, Denis pounced upon the bureau. There, in the third drawer from the top, his shirt drawer—it couldn't have been his sock drawer, of course—lay the comfortable figure of a man in full dress. A short man, he was. Remarkably short, for he fitted with ease into the drawer, which only spanned three feet.

Except for a slight haze that might have blurred his outline just a trifle, there was nothing obvious about the creature to earmark him. But nevertheless Denis entertained no such words of explanation as "midget" or "dwarf." He questioned not his presence, nor did he wait to dispute the little man's implications that his art was dreadful. Instead he fumbled into his tweeds and quietly withdrew to the sanity of the out-of-doors.

THE BRISK AIR freshened him a bit, so he was more clearly able to ponder his problem. To whom should he go for advice? His friends? Certainly not! In the first place, he had few; and in the second place he didn't

"I," said Denis, "intend to hiccup. I intend to double-hiccup. That will destroy you." Denis hiccupped solemnly.

want to lose their respect by refuting his boast:

I'm Denis Alaric, and I can outdrink
Any man and his mistress and her kitchen sink.

That Denis Alaric had come to seeing snakes, or their equivalent in "little men," was something which he feared admitting to friend, foe or doctor. Especially Morris Wakefield, for he knew what the physician's answer would be. Meanwhile, the very lack of his customary eye opener was bringing on the fidgets.

He drifted toward the Rialto Bar. Two blocks of jerky stride brought him to the liquor spot, but no nearer a decision. He told the bartender: "A double rye, Henry. And wrap up—"

"Two quarts," Henry finished for him. He did the requested pouring and wrapping; then, unexpectedly, he stood before Denis and addressed him apologetically but earnestly.

"I know I'm way out of line asking you this, Mr. Alaric, but just what in hell do you do with all that whiskey you buy here?"

"Huh?"

"Do you realize that, with the exception of my day off on Thursday, and Sunday, I've sold you two quarts of rye every day now for almost two years?"

"I drink it. Gotta drink a lot. Gives me lots of imagination. Makes my sketches unique. Women fight over those dizzy designs I get out of a bottle. Women's hats. You can't design them when you're sober."

"You mean you sort of dream them and then draw them?"

"Huh-uh. I live on Bendix Boulevard, see? Lots of strollers out in the afternoon. Well, I look out the window and spot a woman. Then I think hats, see? I think how funny she'd look in something—something, oh, like this, for instance." Denis stroked a paper napkin with a soft pencil and held it up to Henry. "Now imagine two hundred pounds of Mrs. Oscar van Ritz Bitz under that number." For a moment the recent disturbing memory faded in his mind, and Denis vented a bellow of laughter that echoed hollowly through the cocktail room, which was vacantly poised for the cocktail-hour rush. Then he looked at the drawing again, and he dropped the laugh right in its middle. "Say, that's all right. Eisenwehr will like that one." He tucked the napkin into his pocket.

"I see," said Henry solemnly. "But don't you ever . . . ever"—he twiddled his fingers vaguely—"see things, little men and elephants and that sort of thing?"

Abruptly Denis riveted a scowl on the bald barkeeper. "What do you know about little men?"

"Well, I know this much. They make us lose a dozen good customers every year. Look at Clifford Dugan. He only did it to one quart a day. For six months. They poured him into a coffin last week. He'd been seeing the little fellows."

Denis swallowed his drink at this tale of weakness, and his spirit of braggadocio returned. Missing the pertinence of the conversation, he clanked the sack under his arm and chuckled off: "I got capacity."

At breakfast in the adjoining buffet, Denis suddenly remembered the three overdue sketches for Mendlestein. They'd have to be redrawn and delivered quickly or he'd be swapping repartee with the landlord. Whatever other moral repercussions Mr. Alaric's tippling had, one of them was not the usual irresponsibility which blackens the name of an habitual drinker.

Gingerly he let himself into his seventh-floor studio. In his absence the chambermaid had repaired as best she could the ravages of the past twenty-four hours.

A qualm clutched his heart. Suppose she had destroyed the sketches? They were all messed up, and she might think— But no, Mary had more brains than that.

He found the drawing table in order, the board slanted in place, a new stack of paper at its side and—no whiskey-stained sketches.

"Blast that maid! I told her never to throw out so much as a scrap of toilet paper if it had drawing on it!"

His eyes swept the room unsuccessfully, then came to rest on the third drawer of the bureau. It had been closed, but now it was slowly sliding open. A diminutive, black pompadour popped over the edge, followed by a familiar little face with very large, green eyes and a pendulous nose. "Oh, it's you!" the little

man said defiantly, patting the outside of the drawer with an air of proprietorship.

He continued: "I hope you're not looking for those stupid sketches. I took the slight liberty of removing them."

Denis shuddered, uncorked a bottle and drew a long swiggle which made him gag slightly. "Don't be silly. Pixies don't *do* things. They're just a by-product."

There was a violent rustle of starched collars, and in a wink the tiny sartorial wonder confronted Denis with an anger that reached just above his kneecap. "Sir, you underestimate me." With that he delivered to the bachelor's shin a needlelike kick that haunted him for days. Then he reached back in the drawer, drew out the three sketches which he held up momentarily for identification, and deliberately tore them to pieces. Small pieces.

At this auspicious moment, when Denis was contemplating giving in to the hallucination to the extent of pulverizing this obnoxious mite, the door chimes *ging-gonged*.

At the top of his strained voice Denis hollered: "Come in!" The door swung in far enough to allow the maid to insert her head of straggly hair and adoring eyes. "I forgot to leave a note, Mr. Alaric, so I thought I'd better come back and tell you that I pressed your sketches between two sheets of blotting paper, and I put them in your shirt drawer so they wouldn't be misplaced."

"Oh!" Seeing the strips on the floor she almost sobbed. "Oh, you've gone and torn up them beautiful hat drawings. Oh, whydja do it, Mr. Alaric?"

Denis looked at the scraps, at the little man, who stood directly between them and the girl, then scrutinized the maid for six heartbeats. "Why did I do it? Ah. Oh, yes. They were just copies, Mary. Mustn't have extra copies of exclusive designs kicking around loose, you know. Good of you to look out for them, anyway. Thank you." Mary sighed and withdrew.

Holding a bottle between his knees on the edge of the bed, Denis shrugged off his suit coat and jerked his tie until it dangled loosely. "So you are an honest-to-Pete pixy? She couldn't have seen you or she would have said something."

"Of course, she can't see me. You are my sponsor, not her," the little fellow explained, moving slowly toward the bed. "And what's more, I'm now a pixy of the First Order."

"What's that?"

"That means I'm here to stay. You can drink as much or as little as you want, and I won't go away."

"Not even if I—" Denis made as if to heave the whiskey out the window.

"Nope. Not even if you quit drinking altogether." He took another microscopic step, shaking his head vigorously. "You see, I'm not like other 'little men.' I'm smart. You conceived me over a year ago, but did I pop out right away and show myself? No, sir. Almost all Second Order pixies do that, and where does it get them? Either their sponsors drink themselves to death on the spot or they swear off for keeps. And during that first year Second Order pixies are completely dependent on their sponsors. Either way is fatal.

"So, what do I do? I lay in the weeds—"

"My shirt drawer," Denis corrected crossly.

"—and keep out of sight until I graduate. Now I'm here to stay."

Denis listened gravely and thought this over. He perceived a peculiarly

logical note in the pixy's harangue. The fact that his unusual capacity for liquor had forestalled the usual symptoms of alcoholism for so long lent credence to the theory that once it did catch up with him it might persist with great tenacity.

"Get ahold of yourself, Denis," he told himself. "This is nothing supernatural. It's just an hallucination. You get drunk and tip over the whiskey bottle, you get mad and tear up your sketches, you bark your shin on that footstool over there. And then you forget everything until your mind makes up a little man to explain what your memory can't bring back to you directly."

He looked up suddenly to realize that a voice had been saying this, and he wasn't too sure it was his own. For the green-eyed atom stood before him with his rather droopy nose just seven sixteenths of an inch from Denis' drooping chin.

For an instant the desire was almost overwhelming to couple his thumb and forefinger around that diminutive wing-tipped collar and throttle the best-dressed pixy on Bendix Boulevard. But he gritted his teeth on the firm conviction that he would sooner or later find a truncated banana or a mangled lampshade to his credit for the deed. He must repress these impulses.

Think of something else. Get your mind off this.

Denis Alaric pawed through his pockets until he found the napkin from the Rialto Bar. Then he stared deeply into those green eyes and commanded: "Out of my way, runt. I've got work to do."

The pixy stepped aside and bowed. Denis ignored the amenity. At his drawing board he copied the sketch from the napkin with the practiced fingers of a professional artist. When it was through it portrayed two halves of an eggshell with a tiny, full-plumed bird gathered in the crevice.

As he held it up for final inspection a soft voice spoke right at his ear. "Is that really what you do for a living?" asked the little man. He sounded sincerely shocked.

"Now, look here, runt, you get down off the back of my chair. That's what I do for a living, and I'm not making any excuses for my art. Go on, skidoo!"

Instead of skidooing, a wee hand shot out and twisted his ear most painfully. "Just because the sketch sells you think you are an artist. Have you never considered the moral aspect of producing such weird atrocities?"

"There's only one aspect that interests me, and that's the eating aspect. Go on, tell me that I'm prostituting my art. Tell me that I break up homes with my hats. I still got to eat, don't I?"

"But if you must draw hats," the little man insisted gently, "why not draw nice hats? The kind of hats you would really like to see on women. The kind of hats you wouldn't laugh at. Look, I'll show you." Before Denis' eyes a sketch took form that at once charmed and hypnotized him with its beautifully smooth lines. An intricate little twist here, a simple fold there, a splash of color and, for the first time in his life, Denis beheld a woman's hat which he confessed to be attractive. It was a sensible hat, the kind of a hat he'd been wanting to draw for years.

He said as much, then asked: "Can you draw any more like this?"

"Certainly. Watch." In less than five minutes there were two more completed sketches before Denis as pleasing as the first. Enthusiastically, Denis scrutinized them. Then he frowned. The technique, if not

the design, was his own. The same strokes, curves and accentuations. And in the lower right-hand corner was his initial, that screwy little "A" that had trade-marked his work since he left his garret full of nudes in Chicago.

"How in the world did—" He looked around, but he was addressing thin air. The third drawer of his bureau, his shirt drawer, slid gently shut.

Nervously he uncorked and corked the bottle. Then he fumbled his necktie into a misplaced knot. As he buttoned his topcoat he observed himself in the full-length mirror in the door. He thought he detected a tinge of dissipation in that middle-aged countenance. "This is *it!* You've got to do something about this," he told his image. "Talking to yourself. Seeing things. Thanking a pixy who is no one but yourself for making your own drawings. Well, thank God, you can at least draw, even in a daze."

He noticed that his white shirt was rumpled and soiled at the collar. He glanced at the bureau. Then he decided: "Oh, well, Mendlestein is sloppy himself. And he's in a hell of a hurry for these sketches." He skirted the bureau, slipped the drawings into a thin brief case and half ran from the room.

Tonight August Mendlestein was entertaining. He was not sloppy. He was painfully correct in dinner jacket and white tie. Being the innate good business man that he was he didn't discriminate against Denis' tweed slacks and brown topcoat. He did, however, draw him quickly aside into the library.

"Denis, my boy, I'm glad you came. You brought the sketches, I see. Good! Help yourself to the whiskey over there while I make your check."

Denis shook his head. "No, thanks. No whiskey. No."

"Well, you don't have to tell me 'no' three times. Oh, I see," Mendlestein laughed. "You are convincing yourself."

"Better look at those drawings before you make out that check," Denis said briskly. "Something special for you this time. They really belong with Eisenwehr, but then I promised you the next three."

"Eisenwehr!" the stout little man snorted with little noises in his throat. "What does he know about merchandising hats? For every fifteen-dollar copy he sells I sell two exclusives. You should know—" He stopped, forgetting for the moment whatever disparaging remarks there were left unsaid about his competitor. A long minute passed as he scrutinized the top sketch. Then he glanced at the other two, slipped them into their folder and handed them back.

"What's the matter, Mendlestein?"

"Eisenwehr can have them. I agree with you. They should be in his second-rate emporium."

"But, August, those are the best I've knocked out in years."

"Listen, Denis. Years ago we had this all out. You wanted to draw nice hats. I wanted to buy unique hats. So you got mad at me and drank some whiskey and drew some hats and wrapped the sketches around a rock and threw it through my plate-glass window. What did I do? I paid you twenty bucks apiece for the sketches and didn't even deduct the window."

He sighed over his outspread hands. "And now, two years later, you bring me the same old tripe. What's wrong with you, Denis? Are

you out of whiskey, or out of your mind?"

The wealthy milliner saw him out the door with a fatherly pat. "I know how it is, my boy. You got inhibitions. All of a sudden you got to draw what you want to draw. Only," he chided, "when you do, please take them to Eisenwehr. I can't sell them in my shop."

With the closing of the door, the music and gaiety of the party chopped off short, and an unmanageable fear stole over Denis. It wasn't entirely the prospect of the D. T.'s, that is, the ordinary delirium tremens which are more or less inevitable, that made the artist shudder as he left the house. They could be cured the hard way. That is, most men could be cured the hard way. That is, most men could be cured. But for the first time a serious doubt came into his mind that he was merely a victim of alcoholism.

He hailed a cab. Denis started when the cab driver looked him in the eyes. Those eyes were green—or were they? Inside, he wiped cold sweat from his forehead and leaned forward. "Get me to 7622 Doran Street." Before the top light switched off he saw that the eyes weren't green at all. They were blue.

Doctor or no doctor, Morris Wakefield was his only bet now. Maybe he knew of a nice, quiet sanitarium. Or, being a psychiatrist, he might even be able to treat him without prescribing going on the wagon. But that was expecting too much. That was the only reason he hadn't visited the physician before. It certainly looked like the cure for Denis Alaric. But anything was better than returning to the studio and his inhabited shirt drawer.

It was almost eleven p. m. when he rattled the knocker. The butler announced him and conducted him into a firelit drawing room. Morris Wakefield greeted him: "Hello, Denis. Have a drink?"

Denis started to refuse, then changed his mind. He poured a long one and downed it straight. "Thanks."

He sat down and buffed his nails on his left trouser leg. "I hope you don't mind my coming here, Morris. It's a professional call."

"Hell, no. I receive half my patients in front of this fireplace." Wakefield had a plump, bald placidity that fitted the firelight. He plucked an ice cube from a dish and dropped it into his half-consumed highball. "I hate to drink my nightcap alone anyway. Now, what's the trouble?"

"I've been having bad dreams, Morris."

"You want them psychoanalyzed? At your age and with your past?" Wakefield chuckled.

"No. You don't understand. These dreams, I have them with my eyes open. When I'm awake."

The doctor raised his eyebrows. "Not by any chance reptilian daydreams?"

"You're warm. It's a little man with green eyes who lives in my shirt drawer. It's—all very upsetting."

"Tried ignoring him?"

"Ever try ignoring a case of the measles?"

"Tell me about him," Wakefield asked soothingly. Denis fingered the glass stopper of the whiskey decanter.

"What are the D. T.'s like, Morris?"

"Nonsense! You have no more of the delirium tremens than I have. I've never yet seen you drunk. A man loses control of himself, gets to looking like the very devil, can't eat,

shakes all the time— Why, you look practically in the pink."

"Yeah, I feel all right. Except that I've got a star roomer with me right now, and I don't like it."

"Comes of too much introversion, Denis. You need more company. You sit around by yourself too much. Throw some parties like you used to do. Hit the spots. Meet some interesting women."

Denis shook head and shoulders vehemently. "You don't understand."

"Yes, I do, Denis; perfectly. You mustn't let a few drinks convince you that you're falling to pieces. Why, look at me—I regularly drink half a pint a day. Never fazes me. You know, I shouldn't be at all surprised that what you really need is a good bender. Buy yourself a quart and drink it all yourself. You artists need relaxation. Get yourself really plastered, and I bet that when the hangover wears off you'll find out you've had some fun." He yawned cavernously, stood up and stretched. "I'll tell you, that's what you'd better do. Get so stinko that you see little women, then you won't give a hoot about your little men."

Denis stood up, too, and enviously regarded the master of an untenanted shirt drawer. Considering the fact that no one had ever seen him really drunk, it wasn't so incredible that Wakefield failed to recognize the symptoms. But it rather horrified the artist that his renowned doctor friend should so misdiagnose his case.

"Well, Morris, if your prescription doesn't work you'll have to collect your fee out of my hide."

"How's that?"

"The little man has been doing my drawings for me. And they don't sell. Mendlestein just bounced three of them."

A trace of concern disturbed the sleepy moonface for an instant. "Perhaps you'd better drop around to my office in the morning, at that. Maybe a few weeks in a sanitarium would do you good."

"Why, you mercenary old goat," Denis thought to himself as he allowed the butler to scoot his coat over his stiff arms and jerk his undercoat until his collar slightly choked him. "I'll see how I get along tonight. I may be seeing you." He plunged like a ghost into a light fog, muttering: "Buy myself a quart!"

Denis Alaric decided that the dank air was invigorating. Just what he needed. Might as well walk the eight blocks to the studio. Save taxi fare, too.

There was no mail for him when he asked. Just to make certain he peered for two minutes into his little nook on the bank of pigeonholes. No mail. He engaged the elevator boy in conversation, but his lingering good night was cut short by someone on the tenth floor who leaned on the buzzer until the operator got nervous and shuffled the gate suggestively.

When the sliding panels clicked behind him he was alone. Just after midnight. His fingers clenched into hard knots. "Denis, you've been stalling. In thirty seconds you can be in bed and half asleep."

He paused twenty seconds, nevertheless, to admire the ghastly glow of the luminous numbers on his door. "Now! Walk in there, take off your clothes and go to bed like a man. To hell with hallucinations. Tonight they just aren't!"

He thrust the door inward so hard that it bounced back from the rubber doorstop. He then slammed the door shut, switched on his bedside lamp and commenced undressing.

"Have to put on a clean shirt in the morning," he reminded himself.

"From now on I think I'll quit this nonsense. I'll just lay off liquor for a while. That'll do the trick." He stretched and scratched. "Hah! Really wonderful what a good firm resolve will do for a man's morale. Hell, I'm not even nervous any more."

Had he looked at his wrist watch as he wound it he would have seen that it was only twelve minutes past twelve, a little less than three hours before his bedtime. But now, with the light out, his perception was concentrated on sounds.

Catching himself tensed, he forced his muscles to relax. "Really, now, there's nothing to listen for." And there wasn't. Not a sound in the modern, noise-proofed studio. Nothing but the slight scraping of a bureau drawer until it closed with a click. Silence. Denis Alaric slept.

When Denis Alaric awoke at eleven thirty, it was with a "day-of-days" feeling, a thrilling queasiness that increased as he girded himself for a liquorless breakfast and the hardships of twenty-four cold, stone-sober hours. After breakfast at the Rialto Buffet, a quick mental inventory revealed that he still had a quart and a half of whiskey in his rooms. He purchased two more quarts and a pint from Ralph. It was Henry's day off, for which he was thankful.

With something almost resembling optimism he returned to his studio, refilled the half-full bottle and set the four nobles in a row on the far edge of his drawing table. "There. An antidote for any occasion," he assured himself, and went diligently to work with crayon.

Swish! The third drawer of the bureau popped open. "Good morning, Denis Alaric!"

"Morning, runt." Affecting neither surprise nor interest, Denis went on with his smudges. Five minutes passed. Then he realized two things. The muscles of his neck were aching from tautness, and his hand was tracing and retracing the few lines he'd drawn in his first fury of industry. The drawing was ruined. "What are you doing, runt?" he asked without looking over his shoulder.

"Playing laundryman."

With that, Denis swiveled around to look. The pixy squatted comfortably on the footstool with three of Denis' white shirts spread out before him on the floor. He alternately sprinkled the collars with hair tonic and meticulously ironed them with a dilapidated, flat-bottomed carpet slipper. "See? No tickee, no washee," he laughed in the best of spirits.

As annoying as it was to witness the ruin of three clean shirts, something else perturbed Denis a great deal more. This morning the usual aura of mist that characterized the little man was gone. He evinced a smug solidarity that brazenly dared sobriety to dissipate him from existence. Denis checked an almost automatic gesture toward the row of bottles.

He stepped to the window and watched until he spied a fat, well-dressed woman emerging from the marquee across the street. In a flash his conditioned reflex had mentally erased the hat she wore. Before she had taken the four steps into a waiting limousine, he had a hat fully visualized. He had now but to stamp it indelibly in his memory. But at this instant he made a horrible discovery. Her eyes! They were green, and large, and they rolled with a wicked reminiscence.

She was gone, and with her went

the hat, that twisted millinery abortion that might have meant rent money for the next two weeks.

Denis circled the pixy, picked his way through the shirts, and entered the bathroom. He steamed up the shower, stripped and half parboiled himself in the molten stream. Then the quick shock of cold water sent his heart laboring, and he popped from the bathroom feeling fit to face anything with even temper and good spirit.

But he stopped short. Dammit! Where do you suppose the pixy had found those scissors? But found them he had. The pixy was making industrious use of the shears, snipping diamond shapes at staggered intervals in the shirt fronts. Then Denis noticed his drawing paper. The stack was twice as high as he'd left it. When he crossed to investigate he found out why. The whole ream had been cut neatly down the middle and one half piled on top the other.

"Ingenious, don't you think?" the little man asked. "It'll cut your paper bill in half."

"No. I don't think, and I wish I could cut you in half." Denis slouched into his easy-chair and wondered if it would be easier to just turn himself over to Wakefield now, or should he wait and battle it out. It stood to reason that if he stayed away from the stuff long enough the runt would have to disappear. Still —he bethought himself of Morris' advice about going on a good bender —if he didn't get some work done soon he wouldn't have a bureau to his name, let alone the luxury of a bona fide drinking accomplice to inhabit it. And it was certain he wasn't getting any work done in this status.

In a burst of anger he spoke aloud. "That's right, you soft-headed fool. Get drunk! Take the easiest way out."

Absently the pixy looked up. "The easiest way out is the shortest way home. The easiest way out is the shortest way home," he intoned over and over in rhythm to his clicking scissors.

A quaking shudder slipped through the artist and melted his resolve. He cuddled all four bottles in his arms, set three against his spare pillow on the bed, made himself comfortable at full length and tilted the open bottle perpendicular. He caught his breath in a delicious strangle that permeated his head with the taste, smell, feel and sound of whiskey. He wiggled his toes and reveled in his new resolution.

"Ah, runt, this is going to be great fun, this experiment."

"Experiment?" Those great green eyes followed the arc inscribed by the bottom of the bottle as Denis whipped it up three more times with as many gulps. The pixy seemed to lose all interest in his scissors and shirts. A fuzziness melted his outline, and Denis thought he detected a wrinkle of consternation in the pendulous nose. "Really, Denis Alaric, you shouldn't drink so much and so fast. It will make you hiccup."

"Ho, ho, my little goblin, I never hiccup."

"You don't?" Happy incredulity widened the little man's eyes.

"What makes you so happy about that? Hiccupping get on your nerves?"

"My dear Denis, every time a sponsor hiccups he risks the very existence of his pixy. There is always the danger of a *double hiccup,* you know.

"Double hiccup? Bad medicine, are they?" Denis became mildly interested.

"Bad? They're deadly! Of course they are quite rare. And a wide-awake pixy will never let his sponsor get that drunk." As he said this he started to circle casually around the low-hung bed to the side that contained the three bottles.

DENIS watched the proceedings out of the corner of his eye. The pixy went on: "Of course, your never hiccupping makes it easy for me. By the way, don't you want me to put a couple of these on ice for you?"

"Don't bother, thanks." Denis gargled the last mouthful of the first quart and gulped suddenly, contriving to swallow an equal quantity of air. He stared glassily at nothing and awaited the results. It was true, that never to his knowledge had he caught himself hiccupping. But with a little ingenuity there was no reason why—

A Gargantuan belch thundered disappointingly through his teeth. No soap. He broached the second quart and repeated the maneuver. Six more manful tries improved the quality of his belches, but convinced him that his tactics were wrong.

The pixy was regarding him severely. "Denis Alaric, you are deliberately trying to hiccup," he accused.

"I'll say I am," the artist admitted cheerfully. "And what's more, if and when I hit the jackpot it'll be the happiest moment in my life."

The little man moved fast, but Denis was prepared for him. He swung his pillow in an arc that would have smotheringly included the irate mite had he finished his dive; but instead he dodged aside, jumped up on the foot of the bed and wiggled with rage.

"Sit down and quit weaving around. Your bouncing makes me ill."

The little man got a sly look on his face. "Salt pork! Ketchup on cantaloupe! Ice cream and lard," he shrieked and did a dervish on the mattress.

"I didn't mean that kind of ill. Forget it. I got a stomach like a cement mixer." Keeping close guard on the bottles, Denis unhinged the phone and dialed central.

"Get me Maverly 6388."

Morris Wakefield answered the phone himself. "Hello. That you, Denis?"

"Yeah."

"Made up your mind to try a few weeks up at Cloquet Sanitarium?"

"Hell, no! Say, doc, how do you hiccup when you want to?"

"Hiccup? Why, I don't believe I've ever had the urge. Why?"

"I gotta hiccup. I gotta double hiccup."

There was a pregnant silence in Denis' receiver. Then the psychiatrist cleared his throat. "Now about Cloquet Sanitarium, Denis, I think you'll find it just what—"

"You're a rotten doctor. Can't even tell a man how to hiccup when he wants to," Denis grumbled.

Another silence, then: "You'd better sit down and get good and drunk. Will you do that, Denis? Stay right there and get squiffled. Then you might hiccup. Get drunk!" The receiver clicked.

"What in blazes do you think I'm doing over here?" No answer.

Denis slammed down the phone. "For once in your life you're really gonna get drunk, Alaric," he stated. With a mighty pull he vanquished the second quart.

AS HE suckled the fusel oil off the third bottle a splendid inductive idea occurred to him. He spoke into the

phone again, this time without dialing. It seemed he had hardly hung up when a rap sounded on the door.

"Hello, Mary," he greeted the chambermaid. "Say, how do you go about getting rid of the hiccups?"

"Oh, poor Mr. Alaric, have you got the hiccups?"

"Now, don't you worry about me, Mary. I'll be all right. Just tell me all the ways you know of curing the hiccups."

She fussed with her streaky mop of hair and cogitated. "Well, let's see. You can have someone scare you."

The pixy didn't yet understand this line of attack. He stood directly in front of the unwary maid, hopping from one patent leather shoe to the other.

"No, that won't work. I scare the kind of people who scare people. What else can you do?" Denis asked.

"Or you can hold your breath and count to ten."

"Hm-m-m. What else?"

"Or you can"—she giggled self-consciously—"stand on your head and drink a glass of water."

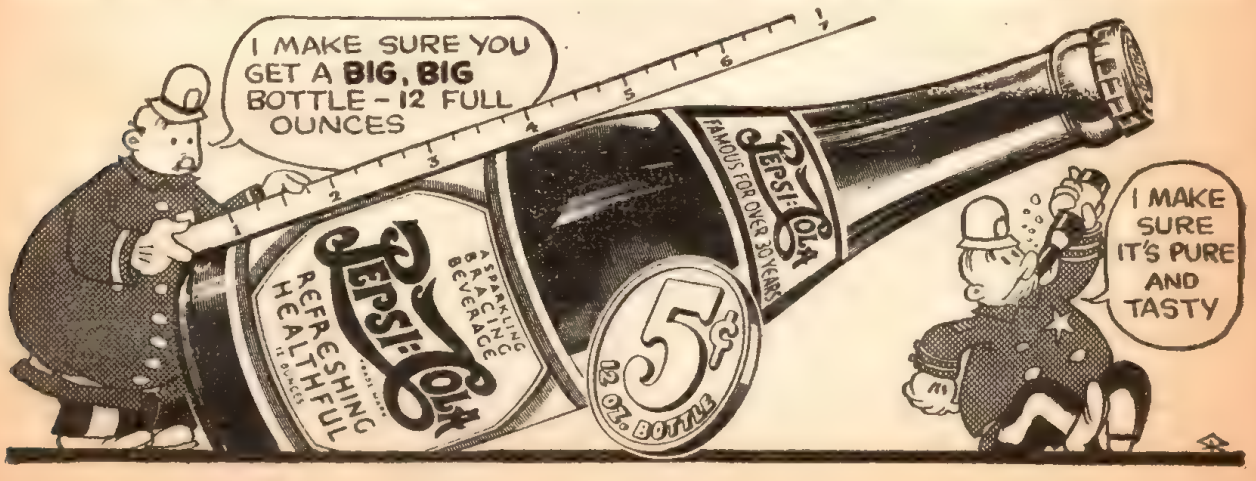
"That's all I want to know. Thanks, Mary. If it works I'll draw a hat especially for you."

Mary overwhelmed herself out of the room.

"Now, all I have to do is to reverse. Let's see." He exhaled every available molecule of air from his chest and tolled off ten generous seconds. This netted him a stomach rumble and a small belch. No hiccup.

He frowned. "Now, what in the devil is the reverse of standing on your head and drinking a glass of water? Must be standing on your feet and *not* drinking a glass of water. That's silly," he told himself. Nevertheless, desperation hunched him over the edge of the bed and he thrust his head ceilingward.

Now, two quarts of whiskey a day were common rations to Denis Alaric. But two quarts of whiskey in less than as many hours he had never consumed before. When he assumed the perpendicular, the blood rushed to his feet, clamored back up his frame until it seemed that every Alaric corpuscle nestled at the roots of his hair. There ensued a gyration of everything in the room, in which his stomach played a major rôle. The only stationary objects were two apprehensive green eyes and a long nose. They swam free in a vortex of dervish chairs, beds, bureaus and bathroom doors. Around and around, faster and faster, they scrambled, until Denis felt like the pillar of a centrifuge. A green centrifuge. Even more than like a centrifuge, he felt green inside. Nothing in the world



could ever stop the whirling. It would be like this always. Always!

But it did stop. A sound, a prosaic knock on the door gently settled the footstool and bed in their places. As he advanced toward the door, Denis had a little trouble with two chairs and the bureau which hovered directly in his path. He dodged, sprinted, stopped and suddenly grabbed his middle.

A pure, white pain stabbed him. A new pain. His shoulders quaked. His back arched like a cat's. He spread his feet wide and clenched his hands for the effort.

Then it came. They came. In staccato, with a wrenching fury that chattered his teeth. One! Two! *Three!*

A triple hiccup!

Denis gave up his attempt to reach the door. He flung his exhausted body on the bed. The recoil from that third and last hiccup had left the memory of a shrill scream in his ears.

Remembering it, he scanned the room. No sign of the little man.

THE POUNDING on the door was getting louder, and the chimes were clanging incessantly. Denis hoisted himself to his feet once more. He tore the shirt drawer from its socket. It was empty. The room was empty. His head was empty—free of fear, freed forever from the obnoxious sight of the green-eyed pixy. His laugh of triumph was rudely interrupted by the smashing in of the door.

Dr. Morris Wakefield, preceded by two pairs of husky, lunging shoulders, stumbled in over the splintered panel. When the internes stepped aside Wakefield gave one incredulous look at the bed, threw back his hairless head and howled. "Why, a midget! No wonder. You poor damned fool!" he gasped between gurgles. He dismissed the two other men with: "I can handle him now, boys."

"Handle me?" Denis yelled. "Me? Hell's bells, I lick the little bugger all by myself and then you come around and want to handle me!"

"Licked who?" Wakefield giggled.

"The little man. The pixy I told you about last night. See"—he made a gloating gesture that included the whole studio and the open shirt drawer in particular—"not a sign of him. And I did it with a triple hiccup, mind you. Not a double. A triple!"

"What are you trying to pull on me, Denis?" the doctor snorted hysterically. He acted very peculiarly, Denis thought. Suddenly the benign amusement gave way to an attempt at a scowl. With his best professional gruffness Wakefield advanced to the foot of the bed, grabbed a handful of air and shook it before Denis' astounded eyes.

Sternly addressing air, he asked: "Now, who put you up to this?"

Very unexpectedly to Denis, thin air gave a weak, but clearly audible, answer; it was sort of strangled as if something were tight about its throat. "I really don't know, sir. This is entirely unprecedented. All I can say, sir, is that Denis Alaric tried to slay me with a double hiccup, and I guess he overdid it; because when he hiccupped three times, instead of killing me it sort of turned things inside out. And now you can see me, and we can see him, and he can see you, but he can't see me, and—"

The little voice cracked off at the peak of this breathless explanation, paused for an instant; then, in a very different, dulcet, tone crooned: "What a dish!"

Denis Alaric pulled the covers over his head and screamed.

WELL OF THE ANGELS

by E. HOFFMANN PRICE

There is a legend of two Angels that Allah sent down—and punished. And they can grant any wish. For a payment—

Illustrated by R. Isip

MOSUL was asleep that afternoon. That dingy hell on the Tigris always dozed through the unbearable heat of the day. Dave Cooper, however, had not learned to sleep, so he sat under the sluggish electric fan in his office and sweated. He cursed the oil company and its five-year grip on

him. He cursed the flies, the dust, the glare that came in through the jalousies which screened the windows.

He drained his glass of warm soda and brandy. In the anteroom, Hassan, the middle-aged office boy, snored contentedly. Somehow, between refilling glasses, Hassan could manage naps. This infuriated Cooper. He said aloud, and bitterly, "Three years, six months, and eleven days more of this hell's hole!"

He blinked and squinted at the calendar. His voice cracked a little when he corrected himself. "No, damn it! Three years, six months, *eleven and a half days*. Today's not over!"

He hurled his glass against the filing cabinet. He liked the sound. He hoped that someone's bare feet would step into the fragments. He hoped especially that it would be Hassan. He disliked that chinless Arab and his mission English; though most of all he hated anyone who could sleep.

Cooper's predecessors, Hassan cheerfully announced that first day, had either died or gone mad in less than three years. "To be exact, sir," the wizened fellow proudly summed up, "the average is two years, eleven months, twenty-four days. Forty-seven percentums die of diverse causes. Fifty-three percentums are carried to Bagdad for observation and treatment."

But out of that sleeplessness and misery came an idea; suddenly, it seemed to Cooper, though actually he had been brooding on it unconsciously ever since hearing bazaar gossip about the peculiar nature of Mosul and the adjoining country. This was something the company had not anticipated. He walked swiftly into the anteroom, where Hassan squatted on the floor.

He was snoring. Flies buzzed about his gaping mouth. He wore a skullcap, a dirty aba, and no shoes. Cooper booted him. Hassan muttered. A second kick made him blink and say in Arabic, "I betake me to Allah for refuge from Satan!" Then, looking up: "Ah wah, sahib! Yes, sir. What is your pleasure, sir? Another brandy-soda, sir? At once, sir."

For once parrotlike mission English did not irritate Cooper, nor servility, either. "No. I want some lessons in magic."

"Magic, sahib?"

"Exactly. Don't pretend you don't understand. This is the old plain of Babîl. Babel they called it at the mission school. Everyone knows the place is filthy with magicians."

Hassan's mouth opened. He gaped and stood there fingering his straggly beard. Then he grinned, winked. "None of the others thought of *that*. My word, sahib! You will fool the company, what?"

One could not just walk out. There was a train to Bagdad, yes. But life ended shortly after one quit the protection of the company and the King of Iraq. Prowling Arabs and Kurds attended to that. Inviting murder and robbery just to spite an employer was pointless.

A supervisor, coming up from Bagdad one week, listened to Cooper's grief. He sighed wearily and said, "You're here, and you're staying here. I'm sorry, old fellow, but that's how it is. A magician might get you a transfer, but nobody else."

A magician. Cooper, looking back, smiled craftily. Wouldn't good old Mr. Burleigh look foolish when the news got to Bagdad!

When Cooper reached for his sun helmet and stalked out of the office, he was not cursing Mosul and the

desolation that spreads far in every direction. The Sinjar Hills rose burned and brown from a burned, brown desert. Their caverns were the homes of Yezidi devil worshipers.

Across the sluggish Tigris was what remained of Nineveh. A dead city. Everything in this accursed plain of Babil was dead. Kalah and Asshur, Hadra and Dar Sharrukin, they surrounded Mosul with mounds that were the graves of cities. Archaeologists used to prowl among these mounds, but since Cooper came to town there had been no digging for bricks with cuneiform inscriptions.

The ferocity of the sun was abating. The snoring ceased in the shops of the mean bazaars. Coppersmiths resumed their hammering. Cobblers and saddlers set to work again, and the dry, hot air reeked of leather. Tall Kurds with massive turbans wound about high conical felt caps walked haughtily down the fly-infested streets.

Wool and dried apricots and gum tragacanth that caravans had brought down from Kurdistan to the river barges gave an alien tang to the air. Far off in the hills, oil derricks rose, gaunt and black. The hot wind brought a petroleum smell that partly masked the reek of the town. There was a cigarette-paper factory, and not far from it a rug bazaar, where merchants sold carpets from Senna and Bijar.

A long time ago Cooper had been an amiable fellow with a purpose and an ambition. Now he was lean and haggard. His eyes were permanently bloodshot. Even without his drinking, the flies and the dust and the glare would have caused that. He looked about him and laughed, thinking of his classmate, Roger Kane. Went out for archaeology. Long-faced because he couldn't join up with an expedition to dig around Mosul. Hadn't seen Kane for ten years. Cooper laughed at the recollection. Good old Kane!

But why not dig? These Arabs: just maggots burrowing in the carcasses of dead cities. Mound after sun-burned mound rose from the plain. Sun-dried brick disintegrated. They buried glazed tiles, sculptured stone. It was all dead. Dead as anyone doomed to live here for five years.

Dead. But master magicians burrowed into the mounds and made classrooms where they taught beginners in magic. Aspiring wizards came from Hindustan, from Egypt, from El Moghreb to learn the art. Everyone knew that. It was a wonder that the company had not written a clause into the contract, so that employees who studied magic forfeited all salary deposits and transportation back to the States.

THAT NIGHT Cooper followed Hassan into the waste lands, where rubbish mounds marked what once had been Kalah and Asshur and Dar Sharrukin. Jackals howled. Small creatures scurried about and made disturbing little sounds. Bats whisked past and brushed his cheeks. The smoothness of their bodies made Cooper shiver.

"Where is the place?" he asked, almost whispering.

The scrawny Arab did not answer. There was a moon, low-hanging, but risen high enough to be white rather than red copper. Finally Hassan halted in a shallow bowl among the mounds. Drifted sand and wind-blown brush made the bottom uneven. Here and there masonry cropped up.

"Looks like a well coping," Cooper said, more to himself than to his companion. He began to have mis-

givings about this inspiration. He was somewhat afraid.

Hassan knelt. He tugged at one of the sand-wedged blocks of stone. "Well coping," he grunted. The block twisted in its bed. "The Well of the Angels, sahib. The hand of Allah sealed the cover, but the hand of man digs in at the side."

He giggled. Cooper wanted to kick him. Then he wondered how anyone so scrawny could have moved so large a rock. It was not pivoted, nor hinged like a door. Cooper echoed, "Well of the Angels?"

"Ay wah! Harût and Marût. God sent them to earth thirteen thousand years ago to enlighten mankind. Satan the Damned sent two Kashmiri girls to tempt them—"

Hassan rolled his eyes, ecstatically sucked in his breath, and made gestures to indicate the shapeliness of the girls. He kissed the tips of the fingers he then pinched together and went on, "It is well known that the Kashmiris are the wickedest of people. So that in the end Allah cast Harût and Marût into this Well, where they hang by their heels even unto this day. And teach magic to whoever would learn."

Cooper wanted to laugh.

Hassan saw the twist of his face and said, "Sahib, may Heaven stuff my mouth with dust if this be not the true truth." He wriggled into the black slot in the coping. "Do not come until I call. I must find the foothold first."

The last few words Hassan spoke were distorted by the air column imprisoned between the bottom and the cover that concealed the mouth of the well. A rock grated, struck, bounced. Cooper began to count seconds. The sound of striking would tell the depth.

He lost count when a woman spoke behind him. He looked over his shoulder, startled. At first he could see only the shapeless Arab gown, and the white shawl that covered her hair. Then he caught the gleam of her eyes, and despite the shadows it seemed to him that she was lovely.

"Do not go," she said. "No man can step out of the circle of destiny, not even by magic. Nor will the Angels of the Pit teach their art to any man without first warning him, '*We are a temptation, what we teach is forbidden, O Man, be not an unbeliever!*'"

Cooper could not answer, though he knew enough Arabic. He merely did not know what he wanted to say. The warning made him shrink back from the black slot. Long ago the solemn words of priests had reached deep into Cooper. But he had never known that any feminine voice could be solemn. This bemused him, and when Hassan called from below he began to wriggle through the slot. He had to go before she persuaded him to stay.

Chest flat against the masonry, hands desperately gripping the edge of the slot, Cooper reached into the darkness with his feet. He groped for a foothold. For an insane moment he shuddered lest the supporting block slip from its fellows and let him drop into the Pit.

At the same time, Cooper looked up at the girl. There was the gleam of pendants at her ears, and a golden collar clasped her throat. He was not certain as to her face, but the curve of her throat told him that she must be beautiful.

Below, Hassan spoke as from a tomb: "Keep close to the wall, sahib. The ledge is just below the slot. Reach down a little."

The girl was saying, "No man can cast off the shackles of destiny save

by the sacrifice of life. Am I not warning you that the Angels of the Well will demand a price?"

"Who are you, *ya bint?*" Cooper challenged. He was now half angry, for she had begun to shake him from his purpose. He knew that her half-seen beauty might persuade him, and he was afraid.

"I am Lilu, and who knows what life will be taken?"

"Mine?" He felt better now. He had found the ledge. "I'm not afraid."

"No." Her ear pendants tinkled. There were small silver bells in the darkness of her hair. Lilu's perfume made his pulse run faster; he had not known that there was such a girl in all Mosul. She went on, saying, "Nor mine, O Man! But be sure there is no life you would begrudge."

"Sahib—" Hassan's voice must now be at the bottom. "We must hurry. See, I strike a light, it is safe."

The whining servant's call reassured Cooper. He went down one step and looked back. He could barely see Lilu. She had spoken. There was no more for her to say.

II.

Shadows and yellow splashes danced when Hassan struck a match. For an instant wavering light played on monstrous shapes. It was not certain whether they were sculptured on the lining of the Well or whether they rose from the bottom. They seemed to have great wings, and curled beards; bull bodies, and the solemn faces of men crowned with tall miters. Somehow these made him think of Lilu's warning.

Then Cooper learned the interval of the treads, and he descended. Soon he was beside Hassan, on the dry sand of the bottom. He wanted to laugh. He did not know what made him light-headed. Perhaps some earthy exhalation of the pit. Perhaps the sudden feeling that this was real; that this was not mummery; that the masters of wizardry were in the Well, visibly or invisibly present.

Harût and Marût. Angels hanging by their heels. Allah's punishment. To the Semitic mind, loss of dignity was worse than death. Chills and electric twitchings danced over Cooper's skin. He began to feel the wrath and fury of the Angels. They were imprisoned for all time, whereas he was caged for five years. Would they mock him or would they pity him?

The silence stretched. Cooper began to hear the *tick-tick-tick* of his watch. The Well amplified the sound. Drums were thumping far off. Presently he knew that that was the beat of his pulse. The veins in his temples tugged against the skin. At any moment a blood vessel would burst. His lips were dusty. His mouth was dry. The then half belief which had made him ask Hassan for a master of magic had become certainty. He understood now why neither acolytes nor doorkeeper took him into any shrine.

No man could see the fallen Angels. Though humiliated before Allah, their honor was intact before man.

When this understanding came he heard the voice of the silence, and saw the illumination of the darkness; though these were neither to the ear of his body nor to his eye. A blue-white flame throbbed and pulsed and twisted spindle-wise in mid-Pit. It was elemental force, and Cooper began to know why the Arabs said that Allah made Iblis of fire.

The soundless voice said: "O Man,

whoever seeks receives. But before learning there is warning. Hear with all your ears, O Man!"

During the pause that followed, a wave of power enveloped Cooper. There were two presences. The force of one amplified the surge of the other as they continued, "He who learns shall have no place in the life to come, for a life is the cost of learning. It is better to believe and fear Allah. Verily, what Allah gives is better than what we give."

This was the warning Lilu had mentioned. Harût and Marût had to warn each pupil. But Cooper flung back his head and laughed in the very presence of the Angels, for a great wisdom had come to him. This could not be evil, since Allah permitted them to practice. The warning was for cowards.

The presences repeated, "What Allah gives is better than what we give."

Cooper's laughter made the well echo. Allah had given him five years in Mosul. Allah had tricked him into the hands of oil sellers who took the blood of men. What could the Angels give that was worse than Allah's gift?

The presences pronounced the third warning: "He who learns shall have no place in the life to come!"

Cooper answered, "Anything to get out of this corner of hell and desolation! If I stay I go crazy. If I walk out I am murdered, or I starve on the beach! What is the magic?"

Twc voices now sounded like trumpets, red and triumphant: "O Man! Three times we have warned, as the law commands, the law of God and Men and Jinn and Angels! Go, for it has been given to you!"

The trumpeting ceased. There was no light in the well. When Cooper's ears ceased rumbling he heard Hassan whimpering. The Arab threshed and groveled on the bottom. He was praying. He called on Allah and on the Christian God.

"Get up, you fool!" Cooper kicked at the sound.

He had new strength. It was like being drunk without being dizzy. It was the strength of fury without the pain of wrath. It was like having the power to fly, yet holding it in restraint. That easy kick lifted the scrawny Arab, piled him in a heap on the steps; a dirty, whitish blotch, for somehow Cooper's eyes were now accustomed to the gloom.

He struck a match. There was nothing but circular wall, laid centuries ago. Some of the pieces were sculptured, the archaic plunder of an even older ruin. Men with curled beards cut square. Women wearing tall miters. One rode a lion. Another drove a chariot drawn by doves. A man hurled thunderbolts. But all this was in half relief. The carved monsters he had seen on the way down must have been illusion.

Cooper seized Hassan by the scruff of the neck and hustled up the treacherous stairway. When they were once more among the rubbish mounds, he said to the Arab, "What were you whimpering about, you blasted fool? You took me down there without hollering."

Hassan answered, "Sahib, there were terrible sounds. It was never that way. Usually there is an old man who speaks what the unseen Angels tell him to say to his pupils. But the old man was not there."

Cooper considered for a moment. So it was different this time?"

"Ay, wah! Ay, wah! There were great wings rustling and a great light blinding me and a howling of all howlings, the crying of many simûns."

"Could you understand anything?"

"Neither seeing nor understanding!" Hassan's teeth still chattered. "Sahib, it was not my fault, I did not do anything, it was not my fault."

Cooper laughed at the moon. As if that scrawny Arab could have added to or taken from those prodigious things in the Well! Instead of the mumbling of some half crazed and self-styled adept of Babylonian magic, the ancient tradition had verified itself in elemental sound and fire. Cooper knew that his escape from Mosul was assured.

He was not impatient. Magic was primarily a matter of purposeful and directed willing rather than incantation and gesture. It was too late now to do any intent willing, and he was a little too shaken for that. Tomorrow, in the cool of the evening. Now that he knew that he could get away, he was patient enough. It might take a few weeks, even, perhaps a month or two or three, for the Bagdad office or New York headquarters to feel the prodding of that power won in the Well of Angels.

The sand and rubbish were air under Cooper's feet. Hassan had difficulty in keeping up with his master. Cooper was saying to himself, "A promotion and a transfer. Take a bit of time; nothing is done in a finger snap. Damn lonesome, this place."

He sighed gustily. Lonesome, all right. What had happened to Lilu? Wonder if the fury and roaring down in the well scared her? From the tilt of her chin she must be a lady, if that word applied to anything living in Mosul. Lilu—funny name—Laylu — lailat — lailatayn — lailtak saidi. What am I thinking of now, saying, "May your night be auspicious!" It all came from layl, which meant night. Funny how ideas link together.

"Lilu—may your night be happy. No, lailtak saidi, that was the way you said it—" He grinned.

Somehow he was not surprised when he found Lilu waiting in the deep archway of his door. But he might have been surprised had he known all the things that lilu means.

III.

Life in Mosul became endurable in spite of the climate. Reports went out promptly. There were fewer errors. Old Man Burleigh wrote from Bagdad: "Best job anyone has made of a difficult post—slated for promotion when your term is up—home office will be gratified—"

Cooper grinned. That was what Burleigh thought, huh? Three years, five months and eleven days more of this hell's hole. Burleigh would look and feel foolish when a man stepped out of the circle of his destiny, kicked loose the shackles of kismet, and made the company like it. Even the high officials were slaves of that monster. It kicked them around, crushed the life out of them. The company would dissolve in a puff of smoke when Babylonian magic blocked its march and forced it into a new path.

All Mosul had, of course, heard of Lilu. Graybeards wagged. Veiled women chattered. Half the town muttered disapprovingly. The other half said, "She is a stranger and an infidel, even if she does speak the speech of true believers."

Then Cooper heard that an infidel dog had come to Mosul to dig in one of the mounds. An archaeologist. One of those dung beetles who burrow in the droppings of time. Cooper chuckled and asked himself, "Wouldn't that fellow's eyes pop be-

hind his horn-rimmed specs if he knew what I know about underground places!"

There was another letter from Mr. Burleigh in Bagdad. His health was none too good. Possibly Cooper could take his place if a sick leave was permitted. He took the letter home to think about it. Lilu, sitting a respectful distance apart as he ate his pilau and sheesh kebab and cucumbers and cakes of bread, wondered about his sudden frown.

"What is it, sahib?" Lilu's anklets tinkled as she hurried toward the table. Possibly too much saffron in the gravy. And it was difficult to get good pine nuts. "What is wrong?"

"Nothing," he answered, and scooped up some more rice.

Cooper was thinking of that warning: magic could be learned only at the cost of a life. Burleigh was a pleasant fellow behind that grim front. The failure of his health—who had ever expected that man of leather and iron to weaken? Cooper thrust aside his chair. He was sick from the sudden certainty of being responsible for Burleigh's illness.

Harassed, red-eyed, sunken-cheeked, sallow. A month ago he had laughed bitterly at the thought of being responsible for any man's death, much less worried thereby. Yet this new Cooper was bound by every thought and act of that half-mad fellow who had shattered glasses to lie in the way of a native's bare feet.

He gulped, swallowed his stomach and his fear. In a moment he went on eating. Lilu was an exquisite creature, and he did not want to hurt her feelings by refusing her food. A strange girl. She pretended that she had not spoken to him at the Well of the Angels. That she had gone there, being desolate in a strange city, to pray for help or an easy death.

"I escaped from a slave trader," she would say. "All my people were free. Of course, sahib, in the mountains. A voice sent me to your house."

She was no Arab. Lilu was taller, and she had blue eyes; the color the natives ascribed to infidels and wizards and witches, though common enough among the Kurds.

"You did know of the Well?"

"Who does not, sahib? But it was a night-prowling spirit that warned you, and not I."

That was her story, and he did not see any need of arguing. And rather than sit there drinking coffee while Lilu plucked an eight-stringed oudh and sang "Zabiyyat," Cooper went out. He did not want to think too much of Mr. Burleigh. He wanted to find some way out of the maze that had hemmed him in ever since Harût and Marût had spoken in the Pit. But he feared that there was no way out.

He wanted to talk to a white man. An American, that is. There were few Europeans in Mosul, but they did not count. A coffee-house loafer guided him to the archaeologist's camp, which was well outside the limits of Mosul.

Men were beating a drum and chanting a bawdy song. There was the smoke of burning brush and dry dung. Then Cooper saw the glow among the mounds and the shapes of khaki tents. He gave his guide a rupee and went on toward the fire.

Dogs yapped, came toward him, snarling. "Hi, there!" he yelled, then cursed the animals in Arabic.

The tall man at the fire leaped to his feet at the sound of an American voice. He stood there, curved pipe

in his hand, chin outthrust, as he squinted into the gloom.

Cooper said: "I'll be damned! Kane! So you made it to Mosul to dig. They didn't tell me your name."

Roger Kane caught his friend's hand. "Last I heard of you, you were in Oklahoma. Say, Iraq's done well by you. You look fine, fellow!"

"Considering this damn climate, I feel fine, too."

Kane called for fresh coffee. There were cigars, carefully sealed against the desert dryness. Cooper refused the camp chair and squatted in the sand. Funny how an American voice made the Well of the Angels seem improbable. But it was odd, Burleigh's sudden illness.

Finally he said, "Looking for anything in particular. Or just gambling? When'd you leave New York?"

"You bet, I'm looking for something specific, which is what I guess you mean," Kane answered. "In this business you don't just dig at random, or throw a tomato can out of your tent and dig where it drops. It's a science today."

"You mean enlightened guesswork. Not entirely science."

Kane nodded. "Naturally, there is some uncertainty. Just as there is in oil drilling. Though much less than there was a dozen or twenty years ago."

"I wouldn't know." Cooper's laugh was grim. "I've held down a desk job ever since we left school, except for two years in the field. Executive, hell! But it's not so bad. Well—what *are* you looking for?"

"A temple tower. The oldest temple site in all this country!" Kane sat up and leaned forward; enthusiasm animated him. "The place was a ruin when Dar Sharrukin was founded. We've just translated inscriptions that tell of what was a tradition in those days."

Cooper was impressed in spite of himself. Here was a man tracing a site that was legendary when some scribe had made wedge-shaped marks on a clay tablet perhaps five thousand years ago.

"Temple tower?"

"Sure." Kane brought his hands closer together as he raised them, edgewise and palms inward. "Ziggurat. Terraced tower. Like those Mexican pyramids, only steeper. Like the Tower of Babel must have been." His eyes gleamed, his voice rang as he went on. "Not far from here is the place where they built that tower. The plain of Babîl, the confusion of tongues. Think of it, fellow! Here, right here, five thousand, six thousand years ago, a man tried to outwit God and fate."

He stopped short. "Sorry—I always rattle when I get going. Can't talk to Arabs. They think I'm crazy, of course."

"Listen." Cooper frowned. "Do you think there was an actual Tower of Babel? That some day you'll find the ruins of it?"

Kane stroked his chin, shook his head slowly. "No, I don't. I think it's a legend based on a mighty fool's attempt to kick loose from fate. Like Gilgamesh and his quest for immortality. Or else it warns against the folly of trying to step clear of the . . . of the fence that destiny puts around us. I think—"

He started, amazed at the succession of changes in Cooper's expression. Cooper demanded, "When did you get this job?"

"Why?" Kane frowned. Something was wrong with Cooper! "What do you mean, 'get this job'?"

Cooper could not explain the fear that had closed in bit by bit during Kane's remarks. It alarmed him,

A blow—and the guard stumbled, collapsed at his feet, breathless and unable to sound an alarm—

hearing a man just from the States saying, "—*fool's attempt to kick loose from fate*—warns against—trying to step clear of destiny—"

Cooper stuttered, "When did you first learn of this place to dig?"

Kane answered, "Professor Hardy and I were at work on the ninth of August. One of our richest alumni just happened to drop in a moment after we finished a translation of some tablets dug up years ago. I never saw a man so moved. He'd never had any interest in archae-

ology, but in a flash he'd financed us. A hundred thousand dollars! Hardy, poor old fellow, couldn't stand the climate. So I came out alone."

Cooper lurched to his feet. "I must have eaten something tonight. Damn cucumbers. See you tomorrow."

And as he stumbled through the gloom he began to make allowance for the time difference between New York and Mosul. The calculation shocked him. A millionaire backer had financed Kane on the very day and hour when he, Cooper, had for the third time declined the warning of the Angels.

But when he finally neared Mosul the fear lifted from him. Cooper argued, "Coincidence. Suppose I'd thought otherwise down there in the Pit. Kane'd still have translated the inscription. Or his friend the professor would have. If not that night, then later. And if not that backer, then someone else."

He felt better now that he had clearly severed Kane's good fortune from that bargain in the Well. After all, it was not remarkable that Kane, speaking of the Tower of Babel, should use terms referring to man's attempt to break the shackles of destiny.

IV.

In the several weeks that followed, Cooper and Kane rebuilt that close friendship which years had almost buried. The oil exile began to find a certain fascination in despised Mosul. He would ride out of an afternoon, when the reports were in the mail to Bagdad, and watch Kane's crew of Arabs. They were digging into the mound that archaeological science picked out from the other rubbish heaps which dotted the burned, brown plain.

Bronzed men, stripped down to loin cloth and turban, gleamed with sweat. Baskets of earth passed from hand to hand, down the long line. The first man chanted, "A basket, O brother, a basket!"

The next, swaying in time, would sing, "A basket, by Allah, a basket!"

And the last man, finally, droned at the dump, "Yea, by God, a basket!"

More song than motion, more motion than work; but slowly the mound was wearing down. Brown men like these had built Babylon and Nineveh and Kalah and Asshur. These called themselves Arabs, but who knew what blood was in them?

One day Cooper saw a squad of Iraqui soldiers lounging in a shed thatched with palm leaves. "Why the army?" he asked Kane, who patiently waited for the first sign of something that had not perished from time.

"Won't be long now. Every basket of earth will be sifted. Every pottery fragment taken up by hand. A lot of things to be photographed in place. Lots of others reinforced so they won't break when taken up."

"That still doesn't explain the troops," Cooper said, chuckling.

"You never saw an Arab who believed it was wrong to steal what grows in the ground. There'd be hordes of looters by night. Looking for antikas. It's not just what they'd steal, but what they'd ruin."

That evening Cooper ate at Kane's camp. Good old American canned goods! He had his choice. Peaches. Chili. Beans. Sausages. He thought, "I'm damn well fed up with loobiya, hhumus-bi-tahhini, Daoud Basha, and the rest!" There had been a letter that day from Bagdad. As soon as a relief man could

come to Mosul, Cooper was to take Mr. Burleigh's place. Such unheard of upsetting of seniority indicated certain and early promotion.

Several considerations made Cooper uncomfortable. He had to settle one, at least. So he drained the juice from his dish of canned peaches, and tried to seem casual when he asked, "Ah . . . um . . . it seemed . . . uh . . . damn funny the way your . . . um . . . millionaire was right on hand the evening you were reading that tablet. The one and only tablet that had a story that could knock him loose from his bank roll. Suppose" —Cooper forced a laugh—"you'd not worked that night, or he'd not called? One of you could have dropped dead. If he had, this work might've been delayed a dozen years."

Kane gave Cooper a sharp look. He slowly set his coffeecup on the folding table and sat up straight. "Do you know, that was the most uncanny thing. I'd have mentioned it to you, but I thought it'd sound—well, silly—if you get what I mean —as if I believed some curious tailor-made bit of fate had elected me."

Cooper noted the sudden thumping of his pulse. A tightness of his throat. He already knew all but the details. "What?" he croaked.

"Oh, all right," Kane agreed after a moment of hesitation. "There was a fire half an hour later. Clay tablets didn't have a chance. What the firemen didn't break, the water destroyed."

Cooper frowned. "You had your notes or you couldn't be digging here."

Kane raised his hand. "They were burned. I'm going pretty much on memory, deduction, general knowledge. All we had was the man's check. We couldn't ever have gotten anyone else to back us."

"Well, you had him."

Kane still had his queer, puzzled look. "That's the fantastic quirk. He could have changed his mind, you know. We were afraid that he would. That sudden flare of enthusiasm didn't seem natural. Hardy and I sat up all night when we weren't pacing the floor. That fire, you know. How would our man feel when we told him that we couldn't go over the evidence again? When we had nothing left to fan his enthusiasm again?

"We had the check, but you can imagine how much chance we had of keeping it against his will. Two schoolteachers. We'd not dare offend a prominent alumnus or take advantage of his momentary lack of judgment, if he saw fit to call it that."

"Well—you're here. It worked out."

"He died that night, without ever knowing of the fire. Heart failure. He'd recruited some football talent, and settling some matter of eligibility proved too much for him. So I am here, and everyone still wonders how a rumor ever got us this fund! Crazy, don't you see, a fellow with athletics on the brain dishing out for archaeology!"

Cooper felt as though he had been clubbed over the head. His release from Mosul was too closely tied to Kane's arrival. The linkage frightened Cooper. It was diabolical as Burleigh's sudden failure of health. He, Cooper, had won a way of kicking off the shackles of kismet, and he was frightened.

SOMETHING evil lurked over him. He could feel it.

But he did not know how certain this was until he said to Lilu, "Tomorrow we go to Bagdad. Tomorrow, and this is the last of Mosul."

Now that liberation was near enough at hand for him to name a day and an hour, he knew that only hope that made him see any day-to-day good in that dingy town, that tangle of mean bazaars sweltering under a pitiless sun. It was not until Lilu spoke that he knew how he hated Mosul, how he had hated it every day since that night at the Well; how his seeming tolerance had only been an expression of triumph over fate.

Lilu said, "I cannot leave Mosul."

He stared at her. "What?"

The moon had risen just high enough to clear the parapet of the housetop. At the farther end was a narrow bar of light that slowly widened. Lilu was a vague, lovely shape in the luminous shadows of the corner.

"I cannot leave Mosul!" She swayed toward him, caught his shoulders, and cried, "Do not leave me here! Not alone! Do not leave me buried in the sand and the deadness."

This plea was beyond understanding. Lilu's tears were warm on his hands when he gently thrust her from him and said, "Here, here, don't cut up like that! Now, why can't you go?"

"Because I can't. I lied to you. I was sent to you. By Harût and Marût. I'm not a human woman. I am one of those who walk by night. One of the lilin."

Bit by bit he understood. She was one of the spirits of the night, like Lilith, who had loved Adam. And Lilith's kin had loved mankind ever since. She was bound to Mosul, one of those assigned to that locality. The Angels of the Pit had given her a form substantial enough to endure daylight. They had sent her to keep him company while he waited to take the first step out of the circle of destiny. But when he made that step he would have to leave her. She would once more be a shadow that haunted ruins and waste places, a fleeting, lovely thing that became vaporous and vanished with sunrise.

There was no way out of it. Lilu sadly said, "If you go to Bagdad, I will not see you again. All the day life I have won will be lost, and I will cry among the mounds, cry with the owls and the jackals, and the Arabs will make signs and take refuge with Allah when they hear me."

He said, "And if I stay, I'll go crazy in this louse-bound town. I've lived on the hope of leaving. But I can't leave, not without you."

He meant that. The loveliness of Lilu had grown on him. She was unlike any woman he had ever known or fancied. Least of all was she like any native woman. These were either very young, very lovely, and very stupid; or else shapeless, shrill-voiced, dirty, and offensive to eye and heart. The Kurdish girls of the mountain tribes—Lilu might be one of those, though that was not quite plausible.

Cooper began to understand what the Angels had meant when they warned him against shattering the shackles of destiny. He would leave, and he would live, yet much of him would be dead from having abandoned Lilu. If her incredible sayings were true—his gradual acceptance of wonders had finally left him without any power to doubt—then her life, half human and half spirit, was the price the Angels exacted.

The studied malignity of Harût and Marût gnawed deeper and

deeper into him. They had read his heart and his thought, and since there had been no life which meant more to Cooper than his own fever and brandy-twisted wretchedness, they had given Lilu the loan of humanity and sent her to him.

Ages ago two Kashmiri girls had taught Harût and Marût such depravities and wickedness that Allah had hung the Angels in the Well of Babîl. And now they took their vengeance on mankind by teaching deadly magic to each discontented one whose lack of fortitude made him attempt to shatter the shackles of fate. Cooper now knew what the Moslems meant when they said "Maktub." He knew now the futility of trying to erase or alter what was written.

Cooper paced up and down the flat housetop. "They warned me," he said aloud and bitterly. "They warned me three times. God does not allow any evil except when a man insists upon having it; that's what the Koran says. And I insisted."

Lilu said, "Ay wah, sahib! And they knew that you would insist."

That whipped Cooper's fury to a cold flame. He halted, stood there a moment, then turned sharply toward the stairs.

"Where are you going?" Lilu asked.

"To curse the Angels," he answered. "Or to bargain with them."

And this time he needed no guide to the Well.

V.

THE DESCENT into the Pit was easy as walking down the broad stairway of the Grand Central Station. Cooper was not alarmed at the facility won by repetition. His fury left him no time for thought. He stood there, waiting for the spirit fire to flame and whirl, and the voice of the silence to ring and trumpet.

His wrath left him empty of fear or awe. When the moments dragged and there was no sound and no thinning of the darkness, he cursed the Angels and the emptiness. First his voice was shrill, then it cracked, then it became hoarse and he could shape no more words. They burned in his mind, even though the echoes ceased mocking him.

The Angels ignored him. He shook his fists at the blackness. He challenged them to come and destroy him. He beat and kicked the sculptured wall of the Well. Finally he cursed Allah, who permitted Harût and Marût's treacherous can-

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dor to trick harassed people.

There was no answer.

His rage made him dizzy. He fell to the sandy floor. For a long time he was without sense or feeling. When at last he began to feel the bitter cold of the dry Well, Cooper was too weary to move. He was not even sure that he had strength to come out of the Pit. He remembered dimly how someone had said that rage distilled a strong stimulant and a strong poison into the blood. This seeemd true. The power had gone, and the venom had filtered through him.

It was then that he heard the voice—not splendid and pealing, but small and fine—a far-off silver whisper. "O Man, we learn the will and the soul of a man by the voice of his wrath, and since there is no fear in you it will be easy to do what there is to be done concerning Lilu."

Cooper brushed the sand from his face and straightened up. He knelt and cocked his head a little. The sound was finer than any gnat's piping, yet each word cleanly shaped; still, its source was uncertain, and it seemed to move, so that there was always danger of missing what followed:

"Go to where the dung beetle digs in the droppings of time, yea, even to what is left of the ziggurat that was old when the first wall was laid about Dar Sharrukin."

Cooper again noticed the cold and became tense. The two Angels, piping as from some remote corner of space, referred to Kane's excavation. This made him apprehensive. For a moment he could not understand them. He heard small twitterings, like the jibber of bats and the squeak of mice. The intentness of his listening became painful. It seemed that he was missing important counsel.

Then he knew that the Angels had been consulting with each other, for suddenly he could hear direct address. One said, "Go and dig and get that silver image whose face and figure are Lilu's, and take it always with you." The other piped, antiphonally, "For she is the counterpart thereof, and where it goes she also may go, in any circle within a day's march." Then the first voice: "Yea, did we not bring one to dig so that there would be little for you to lift?" And both piped together: "O Man, well do we know the will and soul of a man by the voice of his wrath, and we reward him according to the stature of his soul. The girl is your fate, and have we not delivered her fate into your two hands?"

Suddenly Cooper knew that the Angels had no more to say. They had drawn back into the silence from which they had come. They had given him another lesson in magic, he realized as he ascended to the surface. For it was now plain that so long as the will and the soul of a man are strong, a way is opened.

Head high, he looked into the moon and laughed. He said aloud to the waste lands and the shifting light and shadow, "They knew I'd not leave her here. Tough about Burleigh, but when did he ever give me a chance?"

Now that he had faced the loss of Lilu, it seemed very small, this matter of whether or not he killed Burleigh by demanding escape from Mosul. When a man dares to curse gods and Angels, a power grows in him, and he cannot quench it, nor does he want to.

Cooper went back to his house. He got his flashlight. He did not need any implements. The Arabs would have left enough tools in the

excavation. But the heavy knife that Lilu used to mince mutton and eggplant would be handy for silent digging. One could crouch and ply the blade, where one would have to stand to use a shovel. Also, a one-handed implement left the other free to hold a light. He remembered all this at the door and went back for the knife.

When he waked down the narrow streets of the town he was troubled by the thought of robbing Roger Kane. It was not that Kane's one-hundred-thousand-dollar endowment and an Iraqui government permit gave him any exclusive moral right to what had been buried long before the foundations of Dar Sharrukin were laid. Indeed, Cooper knew from the first that his own right was greater. Two Angels had sent Lilu to him, and the silver image that governed her circle of material existence surely was part of her strange being. And the government could not give a woman's life to an archaeologist. That was plain.

There was much about Babylonian magic that he did not know, not even intuitively, but it was certain that he had a right to the silvery symbol, which perhaps was a focal point of the forces which let Lilu materialize. Yet he was uneasy. He felt that instead of slipping into the excavation by stealth he should go openly and manfully and ask Roger Kane for that small gift.

However, he knew that Kane would not grant it to him. Kane had curious scruples. He worshiped abstractions such as science and learning. This mission in Babîl was sacred. One could no more hope to bribe or browbeat or beg him from his purpose than one could have deflected Peter the Hermit from the crusade he preached.

"If he doesn't know, he's not hurt," Cooper argued. "If I told him Lilu's existence depended on it, he'd think I was crazy. Maybe I am crazy, too, but look at how mad facts can be. Even if he believed me, he could not ethically give away any of his find. It belongs to a university, to be labeled with a dead man's name. He'd be sorry, awfully sorry; he'd be between two fires. and he'd say 'no.' That would always be between us."

So, since he was keeping Kane from being troubled by an evil choice, Cooper felt better about it all. Stealthily he crept toward the sleeping camp. At least one of the soldiers must be on post, but Iraqui Arabs were no more addicted to insomnia than any other kind. Particularly when there was no officer to have them jailed or flogged for sleeping on duty.

Moonlight made the task more difficult. If he waited, the Arabs would uncover the statuette, and under Kane's keen eye. It was uncanny how these things were timed. A man had come from America, had hired scores of laborers, had dug away uncounted tons of rubbish so that one man could in a few minutes dig up a silver image not much longer than his hand. But as he wormed his way through the shadows, just past Kane's tent, Cooper stopped. His breath was failing. Something tightened his throat. Electric twitchings tickled his skin, played at the base of his skull.

The awesome picture of how one man's fate is linked with the fate of men far off and unknown disturbed Cooper. He was almost afraid of what he was about to do—shatter the shackles of fate, take Lilu by the hand and lead her with him through this cleft he had made in the circle of his destiny. And seeing at once all the things that had

led to this moment, all the acts and thoughts of men divided by miles and years, he knew how awful it is to tamper with the links of destiny.

THEN Cooper hardened his heart, and he moved past the sentry who crouched on the edge of the Pit. The fellow snored, of course. His rifle lay beside him. It was barely visible in the blotch of shadow that concealed him. And Kane, Cooper knew from passing the tent, was sound asleep. A cot creaked, and a breathing that carried clear in the silence had made that certain.

Cooper's instruction grew in detail as he approached the designated corner of the pit. That was a peculiar aspect of the magic that Harût and Marût taught. Magic was logical. It was merely a matter of being in tune with the breath and pulse of the world; and all things of creation were not only revealed, but also subjected to the magician. Ritual and incantation did not seem to enter at all. And this being in tune, Cooper now realized, would never leave him; no matter where he went, his wisdom would also go.

Here, where the Arabs had exposed archaic sun-dried brick, where granite from the far-off hills shaped a pediment, gleaming smooth in the blue-black shadows; where part of a tiled wall had resisted the shock of conquest and centuries; this was the frieze of parading archers the Angels had described. Cooper knelt and plied the heavy knife for perhaps three minutes, silently and without any misgivings. He did not even need the flashlight beam. His fingers now had vision, he had strange new senses he could not name, and these were all concentrated on the hidden statuette.

Wonder shook him. In his thoughts he said, "I see it already. I hear it speaking to me. I smell Lilu's perfume. I touch the smooth silver and I touch Lilu also. I taste the clean silver." This was amazing, this uncanny concentration of every sense, but most baffling was that addition of new senses. He could also perceive things with respect to their places in time itself. At once he saw this spot when man for the first time erected a building on it; when bearded men called it Dar Sharrukin; when mitered priests put a silver statuette into a crypt so that not even time could destroy the foundations. Also, he was looking as far into the future. When a man breaks the shackles of fate, the present and past and future become one!

Now that he had the statuette in his hands, he could not quite separate his identity with that of the priests. He was not sure whether he was removing it or putting it into the crypt. Whether the men about were helping or hindering him. It was not until a yell shattered the complex time web that Cooper knew what had happened.

His uncannily certain digging had undermined some loose bricks. They slid noisily down a slope and made a stack of tiles clatter. The sentry started, yelled, then fired a shot. The bullet went wide of its mark, of course. Cooper snatched his prize and scrambled up the slope. His flashlight clattered down grade, falling from his pocket.

Cooper was not afraid. He knew that he could not be captured. A soldier, half asleep, came empty-handed to head him off. They crashed, rolled down the outer slope. Cooper was the first to recover. He jabbed sharply with his knee, and the soldier was knocked breathless.

But the escape was hampered. A flashlight blazed, blinding Cooper as

he wriggled clear of his gasping opponent. Just a dazzling flicker, scarcely long enough to identify him, but enough to leave his eyes quite useless for an instant. Right when split seconds counted, Cooper was virtually in blackness darker than the Well of the Angels. His head whirled from the shock of landing, and the cries of the aroused camp seemed to come from every direction at once. The super senses so lavishly and needlessly crowded into the digging were now wholly lacking; or what remained of them was only enough to be confusing.

He still had a chance, but he could not regain the all-knowing and all-seeing power of the Pit. A man's hands closed on his threshing legs. Another yelled and snatched at the silver statuette. That was when Cooper thrust with the heavy knife.

The man cried out and let go. Cooper kicked free from the other one. He gained his feet. He could now see. He had a clear start. Then he recognized the man he had stabbed. It was all very plain in the beam of the flashlight that lay on the ground. Even moonlight would have sufficed.

Cooper was already running, swiftly, stretching long legs. Arabs howled, "He has slain the sahib! Beware!" Others cursed, and two fired crazily at the man who raced easily in and out among the mounds. In a few seconds they could no longer see him, though they continued firing and yelling instead of pursuing.

It was quite true. Cooper had in that one instant of human panic lost control. For on instant his magic had failed. He had blindly stabbed, and his friend was dead. Cooper knew that Kane must be dead. He knew that this was the life that the Angels had demanded.

He knew also that no pursuit could overtake him, so he walked slowly among the mounds and tamarisk of the plain of Babil; and the moon rose white and high while he walked.

He said, over and over, "This proves that I am outside the circle of destiny. I have broken the shackles of fate. It was once said that a king is next to God, and I am more powerful than any king ever was. From now on the Angels of the Well will serve in everything."

The knife? There were dozens like it in Mosul. The flashlight? Presumably one of Kane's. Footprints? The police force of Mosul was sketchy. Moreover, a full-

fledged magician with two Angels to serve him was exempt from law. Cooper no longer believed this, he knew it; a calm, certain knowledge.

This knowledge was so solemn that he halted not far from the Well, toward which he had been walking all that while. Harût and Marût had, in their malice, planned this from the first, and he had blindly demanded their gift. He began to think of how he and Kane had gone to school. How good that friendship must have been to have endured and become ripe and rich about a campfire in Mosul.

This was plainly not a matter for remorse. Remorse was for the survivor whose recklessness had caused a fatal auto crash; for the hunter who had pointed an "unloaded" gun at a comrade; for one who had cursed his parents or struck a child. But a man who has stepped out of the circle of destiny could not say, "I did not know."

He stood there, and without trying to speak those words. He could not have spoken them if he had tried. He did not want their futility in his ears and mouth. Finally he remembered that he had gone for a silver statuette, and that it was in his hand; in the one that was not stained with a friend's blood.

He looked at the little image. He looked beyond it, in time and space, and saw it in more than Lilu's face and figure. Now that he had paid the price, he knew fully what it meant to break the shackles of kismet. He could follow any act to its remote origins, a million years ago, and trace its every root and source. He could follow every act to its uttermost consequence.

Thus he halted at the entrance of the Well instead of going down into it to curse God and the Angels. Knowing the immensity of the thing he had learned to do, he could not revile them for the price they had taken. Yet Lilu was not worth a friend's life, so he set the image near the coping, where drifting sand would soon bury it. Then Cooper walked westward, away from the broad Tigris, and away from Mosul.

Soon the sun would rise behind him and blaze against his bare head. He would feel this only for a few minutes. Perhaps he would not feel it at all. For inside his head there was now a vast whirling flame. While there was no salvation for a fool who tries to change the pattern of the web, Cooper knew that there was merit in declining the harvest of folly. He did not any longer want to escape. And he knew equally that it was folly to blame the Angels. They, too, were paying the cost of broken kismet.

So he walked, knowing that not long after sunrise he would leave his body in the sands west of Mosul. Possibly he would meet Kane somewhere on the march. Good old Kane; he'd not be resentful.

Cooper did not hear the Angels sighing in the Well. He did not hear Harût say to Marût, "We should have told him that the soldiers had been plotting to murder Kane for his canned goods and then to desert and become bandits in the Sinjar Hills. In another few days they would have gotten up their courage." He did not hear Marût answer, "That would not have changed the issue, for a man does what he will do."

Then there was silence in the Well, for the two Angels were sad. They were thinking of the day when they had been warned against the wiles of the two Kashmiri girls sent by Satan the Damned—

THE PIPES OF PAN

by LESTER del REY

If a god is a god only so long as he has worshipers, and Pan was forced to seek employment—

Illustrated by R. Isip

BEYOND the woods on either side were well kept fields and fertile farm land, but here the undergrowth ran down to the dirt road and hid the small plot of tilled ground, already overrun with weeds. Behind that, concealed by thicker scrub timber lay a rude log house. Only the trees around, that had sheltered it from the heavy winds, had kept it from crumbling long before.

Pan recognized the lazy retreat to nature that had replaced his strong worship of old. He moved carefully through the tangled growth that made way for him, his cloven hoofs clicking sharply on the stones. It was a thin and saddened god that approached the house and gazed in through a hole that served as a window.

Inside, Fred Emmet lay on a rude pallet on the floor, a bag of his possessions beside him. Across from him was a stone fireplace, and between the two, nothing. A weak hand moved listlessly, brushing aside the vermin that knew his sickness; perhaps they sensed that the man was dying, and their time was short. He gave up and reached for a broken crock that contained water, but the effort was too great.

"Pan!" The man's voice reached out, and the god stepped away from the window and through the warped doorway. He moved to the pallet and leaned over his follower. The man looked up.

"Pan!" Emmet's words were startled, but there was a reverent note in his labored voice, though another might have mistaken the god for a devil. The tangled locks of Pan's head were separated by two goat horns and the thin sharp face ended in a ragged beard that seemed the worse for the weather. Then the neck led down to a bronzed torso that might have graced Hercules, only to end in the hips and legs of a goat, covered with shaggy hair. Horror and comedy mingled grotesquely, except for the eyes, which were deep and old, filled now with pity.

Pan nodded. "You've been calling me, Frank Emmet, and it's a poor god that wouldn't answer the appeal of his last worshiper. All the others of your kind have deserted me for newer gods, and only you are left, now."

It was true enough. Over the years, Pan had seen his followers fall off and dwindle until his great body grew lean and his lordly capering among the hills became a slow march toward extinction. Now even this man was dying. He lifted the tired head and held the crock of water to Emmet's mouth.

"Thanks!" The man mulled it over slowly. "So when I'm gone, there's no others. If I'd 'a' known, Pan, I might have raised up kids to honor your name, but I thought there were others. Am I—"

"Dying," the god answered. The

Pan piped softly and mournfully at the grave of his last worshiper—

blunt truth was easier than half-believed lies.

"Then take me outside, where the sun can shine on me."

Pan nodded and lifted him easily, bearing him out as gently as a mother might her child, but a spasm of pain shot over the man's face as Pan laid him down. The time was almost up, the god knew. From a pocket in his tattered loincloth he drew out a small syrinx, or pipe of seven reeds, and blew softly across it. A bird heard the low murmuring melody and improvised a harmony, while a cricket marked time in slow chirps.

Emmet's face relaxed slowly and one of his hands came out to lie on the hairy thigh. "Thanks, Pan. You've always been a good god to

me, and I'm hoping you'll have good l—" The voice trailed away and disappeared into the melody of the syrinx. Pan rose slowly, drawing a last lingering note from it, dropped the arm over the still chest and closed the eyes. Nearby was a rusty spade, and the earth was soft and moist.

Pan's great shoulders drooped as he wiped the last of the earth from his hands. Experimentally, he chirped at the cricket, but there was no response, and he knew that the law governing all gods still applied. When the last of their worshipers were gone, they either died or were forced to eke out their living in the world of men by some human activity. Now there would be hunger to satisfy, and in satisfying it, other needs of a life among men would present themselves.

Apollo was gone, long since, choosing in his pride to die, and the other gods had followed slowly, some choosing work, some death. But they had at least the advantage of human forms, while he knew himself for a monster his own mother had fled from. But then, the modern clothes were more concealing than the ancient ones.

Inside the house he found Emmet's other clothes, more or less presentable, and a hunting knife and soap. Men were partial to their own appearance, and horns were a stigma among them. Reluctantly, he brought the knife up against the base of one, cutting through it. Pain lanced through him at first, but enough of his god-head remained to make the stumps heal over almost instantly. Then the other one, followed by the long locks of his hair. He combed it out and hacked it into such form as he could.

As the beard came away he muttered ungodly phrases at the knife that took off skin with the hair. But even to his own eyes, the smooth-shaven face was less forbidding. The lips, as revealed, were firm and straight, and the chin was good, though a mark of different color showed where the beard had been.

He fingered his tail thoughtfully, touching it with the blade of the knife, then let it go; clothes could hide it, and Pan had no love for the barren spine that men regarded as a mark of superiority. The tail must stay. Shoes were another problem, but he solved it by carving wooden feet to fit them, and making holes for his hoofs. By lacing them on firmly, he found half an hour's practice enough to teach him to walk. The underclothes, that scratched against the hair on his thighs and itched savagely, were another factor he had no love for, but time might improve that.

Hobbling about in the rough walk his strange legs necessitated, he came on a few pieces of silver in another broken crock and pocketed them. From the scraps of conversation he had heard, work was hard enough for men to find, and he might need this small sum before he found occupation. Already hunger was creeping over him, or he guessed it was hunger. At least the vacuum in his stomach was as abhorrent to him as to nature. Heretofore, he had supped lightly on milk and honey as the moon suited him, but this was a man-sized craving.

Well, if work he must, work he would. The others had come to it, such as still lived. Ishtar, or Aphrodite, was working somewhere in the East as a nursemaid, though her old taste for men still cost her jobs as fast as she gained them. Pan's father, Hermes, had been working as a Postal Telegraph boy the last he'd

seen of him. Even Zeus, proudest of all, was doing an electrician's work somewhere, leaving only Ares still thriving in full god-head. What his own talents might be, time alone would tell, but the rippling muscles of his body must be put to some good usage.

Satisfied that there was no more he could do, he trotted out and plowed his way through the underbrush that failed to make way for him as it should have. He jingled the money in one pocket thoughtfully as he hit the road, then drew out the syrinx and began a reedy tune of defiance on it. Work there must be, and he'd find it.

It was less than half an hour later, but the god's feet were already aching in the tight boxes he had made for them, and his legs threatened to buckle under the effort it took to ape man's walk. He moved past the ugly square house and toward the barn where the farmer was unhitching his team.

"Handout or work?" The man's voice was anything but enthusiastic.

"I'm looking for work."

"Uh-huh. Well, you do look strong enough. Living near the city the way I do, I get a lot of fellows in here, figuring they can always work in the country. But their arms wouldn't make toothpicks for a jaybird. Know anything about farming?"

"Something." It was more in Demeter's line, but he knew something about everything that grew. "I'm not asking more than room and board and a little on the side."

The farmer's eyes were appraising. "You do look as if you'd seen fresh air, at that. And you're homely enough to be honest. Grab a-holt here, and we'll talk it over. I don't rightly need a man, but— Hey! Whoa, there!"

Pan cursed silently. His god-head was still clinging to him, and the horses sensed the urge to wildness that was so intimately a part of him. As his hands fell on the tugs, they reared and bucked, lunging against their collars. He caught at the lines to steady them, but they flattened back their ears and whinnied wildly. That was enough; Pan moved back and let the farmer quiet them.

"Afraid I can't use you." The words were slow and decisive. "I use a right smart amount of horseflesh here, and some people just don't have the knack with them; animals are funny that way—temperamental, you might call it. Easy, there, Nelly, Tried any other places?"

"All the other farms along the road; they're not hiring hands."

"Hm-m-m. Wouldn't be, of course. Bunch of city men. Think they can come out and live in the country and do a little farming on the side. If I had the money, I'd sell out and move somewhere where people knew what the earth was made for. You won't find any work around here." He slapped a horse on the withers and watched as it stretched out and rolled in the short grass. "Stay for lunch?"

"No." He wasn't hungry enough to need food yet, and the delay might cost him a job elsewhere. "Any sheepherding done around here?" As the god of the shepherds, it should come natural to him, and it was work that would be more pleasant than the tight closeness of the city.

"Not around here. Out West they have, but the Mexicans do all that. If you're a sheep man, though, that's why the horses didn't take to you; they hate the smell of sheep."

Again the limitations of a human life imposed themselves; instead of

transporting himself to the sheep-herding country in a night, he'd have to walk there slowly, or ride. "How much would it cost to go out West?"

"Blamed it I know. Seventy dollars, maybe more."

So that was out. It would have to be the city, after all, where the fetid stench of close-packed humans tainted the air, and their meaningless yammering beat incessantly in one's ears. "I guess I'll have to go on into town," he said ruefully.

"Might be best. Nowadays, the country ain't what it used to be. Every fool that fails in town thinks he can fall back on the country, and every boy we have that amounts to anything goes to the city. Machinery's cutting down the number of men we need, and prices are shot haywire, even when a mortgage doesn't eat up all we make. You traveling on Shank's Mare?"

Pan nodded, and the other studied him again. "Uh-huh. Well, down the road a piece you'll see a brick house set way back from the road. Go in there and tell Hank Sherman I said you was a friend of mine. He's going into the city, and you might as well ride. Better hurry, though."

Pan made his thanks hastily, and left. If memory served him right, the friendliness of the farmer was the last he'd see. In the cities, even in the old days, men were too busy with their own importance and superiority to bother with others. But beggars made ill choosers.

The god clumped down the hot sidewalk, avoiding the press of the one o'clock rush, and surveyed the signs thoughtfully. Food should come first, he guessed, but the prices were discouraging. One read:

BUSINESS MAN'S LUNCH

Blue plate special, 75c

He cut away from the large street into an older part of the city, and found that the prices dropped steadily. Finally a sign that suited his pocketbook came into view, and he turned in, picking the only vacant booth. Now he was thankful for the time he'd believed wasted in studying men's ways.

The menu meant little to him. He studied it carefully, and decided that the safest course was to order one of their combinations. Fish—no, that was food for Poseidon. But the lamb plate looked better, and the price fell within his means. "Lamb," he ordered.

The waitress shifted her eyes from the man behind the counter and wrote it down in the manner of all waitresses who expect no tip from the customer. "Coffeetearmilk?" she asked. "Rollerwhiterrye?"

"Eh? Oh, milk and roll." Pan had a word for her type in several languages, and was tempted to use it. As a god—but he wasn't a god now, and men no longer respected their gods, anyway. The cashier eyed his clothes thoughtfully until he moved in irritation, jingling the few coins in his pocket. Then she went back to her tickets, flipping gum from one tooth to another in an abstract manner.

The food, when it came, was a soggy-looking mess, to him, but that was true of all human food, and he supposed it was good enough. At least the plate was better filled than those he had seen through the windows of the more expensive places, and Pan's appetite was immense. He stuffed half a roll in his mouth and chewed on it quickly.

Not bad; in fact, he might grow to like this business of eating. His stomach quieted down and made itself at home, while another half bun followed the first. As he started to

pick up the cut of meat and swallow it, he caught the eyes of another diner, and rumbled unhappily. Should he know the sissies nipped off shavings with their knives and minced the food down? But he put the meat back on the plate and fell to as they did. It was best to ape them.

"Mind if I sit here, old-timer?" Pan looked up at a clean-cut young man. "The other booths are filled, you know."

Where the man sat was no business of his. The seat opposite him was vacant, and he motioned to it. "I didn't buy it, and your face isn't misshapen. Sit down."

The other grinned good-naturedly and inspected the menu. "Lamb any good?"

"Seems all right." He was no judge of food, naturally, but it wasn't burned, and he had seen no dirt on it. At least his stomach was satisfied. He cleaned the last of the gravy from his plate with a bun and transferred it to his mouth. "At least, it partly fills a man."

"O. K., lamb it is." This time the waitress showed more interest, and even brought water, a thing she'd neglected before. "Make it lamb, sugar. And a beer. How about you, stranger?"

"Eh?" Unless he was mistaken, that was an invitation, and a welcome one. It was long years since he'd had a chance to sample even the anemic brew of the modern world, but that had been none of his choosing.

"Have a beer?"

"Why not?" As an after-thought, he added an ungodlike thanks. The man was likable, he decided, though friendship among city men was not what he had expected. "You wouldn't know about work in this city, would you—uh?"

"Bob Bailey."

"Men call me Pan—or Faunus, sometimes."

"Pan Faunus, eh? Tried the want ads yet, or the employment agencies?" Bailey pulled a folded paper from his pocket and handed it over. "There might be a job in the back there. What kind of work?"

"Whatever I can do." He began at the bottom and skimmed up the list from xylophone players to bartenders. "But nothing they have here. I'm supposed to be good at herding and playing the syrinx, but that's about all."

"Syrinx?" He inspected the instrument Pan held out, and amusement danced in his eyes. "Oh, that. Afraid it wouldn't do, Mr. Faunus. You don't happen to play the clarinet?"

"Never tried it."

"Then you don't. I'm looking for someone who does, right now, for my band—Bob Bailey's Barnstormers. Ever hear of it? Well, you're not the only one. Since we lost the best darned clarinetist in the business, we've slipped plenty. Playing the third-rate spots now with the substitute we had to hire. Corny? *Wheoo!* He used to be on the Lady Lee Lullaby hour, and never got over it."

"Why not get a good one then?" The talk made little sense to the god, but the solution seemed obvious.

"Where? We get plenty of applicants—there's an ad in there now. But they'd either soothe the jitterbugs to sleep or rattle the strings off the dog house. Not a good clear tone in the bunch. All the good guys are signed up, or starting their own outfits."

They finished the beers and Pan counted out the amount marked on his ticket, estimating the length of time what was left would last; two

days maybe, by going half hungry. He grunted. "Where are these employment agencies you mentioned?"

"One just down the street. It's a United States' employment center, and won't try to rob you. Good luck, Faunus."

"And to you. My thanks for the beer." Then they separated, and Pan headed down the street toward the mecca of the jobless. The ads had all called for training of some sort, but there must be other work in this town that needed no previous experience. Perhaps meeting two friendly men in one day was a good omen. He hoped so.

THE GIRL at the desk, when he finally found the right division, looked as bored as had the waitress. Looking over the collection of people waiting, Pan felt she had more reason. There were the coarsened red faces of professional sots, the lackluster stares of men whose intelligence ranked slightly below the apes, and the dreary faces of people who struggle futilely for a life that brings nothing but death to break its monotony.

But there were others there who looked efficient and purposeful, and these were the ones Pan feared. They had at least some training, some experience, and their appearance was better than his. Surely the preference would go to them, and even as a minority, there were still many of that type there.

He studied the applicants and strained his ears to familiarize himself with the questions asked, holding down his impatience as best he could. But the machine ground slowly on, and his time finally came, just as the hot fetid air was becoming unbearable. "Your name," said the girl studying him impersonally.

"Pan—Pan Faunus."

Many strange names had passed over the desk to her, and her expression remained the same. "Middle name?"

"Uh . . . Sylvanus." The Romans had done him a good turn in doubling up on their names for him, though he preferred the Greek.

"Address?"

For a moment, that stumped him. Then he gave the address of the restaurant, figuring that he might be able to arrange with the cashier to accept any mail that came there; he'd heard another man talking of that scheme while he waited, and it was as good as any.

"Age?"

"Seven thou— *Ulp!* Forty-five." Since a pack of lies were needed of him, they might as well be good ones. "Born June 5, 1894."

There were more questions, and at some of his answers the girl looked up sharply, but his wits had always been good, and he passed the test with some fair success. Then came what he had been dreading.

"Experience and type of work?"

"General work in the country," he decided. "No trade, and I can't give references, since my former foll—employer is dead."

"Social Security Number?"

"Eh?" He had been hearing that asked of the applicants, but it still meant nothing to him. "I don't have one."

"Sorry." She nodded. "Naturally you wouldn't, as a farmhand. You'll have to have a card, though. Get that as soon as you find work."

Finally it was done, and he was sent into a cubbyhole where a man asked more questions and made marks on a piece of paper. Some of his answers were true; Hermes was his father, at least. Even that questioning came to a final end that left him sweating and cursing the under-

clothes that itched again in the hot room. The man leaned back and surveyed him.

"We haven't much of a job for you, Mr. Faunus. As a matter of fact, you'd probably do much better in the country where you came from. But" —he searched through his records— "this call just came in for an office boy, and they want someone of your age, for some reason. It pays only $12.50 a week, but they didn't mention experience. Want to try it?"

Pan nodded emphatically and blessed the luck that had opened the job at precisely the right moment; he'd seen enough others turned away to know how small his chances were. He wasted no time in taking the little address slip and tracking the job to its lair.

Late afternoon found him less enthusiastic about the work. The air in the office was thick and stuffy, and there was an incessant thudding from the typewriters, jarring of the comptometer, and the general buzz that men think necessary to business. He leaned over on the table, taking some of the ache from his tired feet and cursing the endless piles of envelopes that needed sealing and stamping.

This was work for a fool or one of the machines men were so proud of. Pick up an envelope, draw one finger under the flap to lift it, roll the flap over the wet roller, and close it with the other hand as it came off. Lift, roll, seal, lift, roll, seal. No wonder men shut themselves in tight houses, away from the good, clean winds and light of the sun; they were ashamed of what served for life among them, and with good reason.

But if it had to be done, he was willing to try. At first, the exultation of getting the work had served to keep his mind from it. Lying and deceit were not his specialty, and only a driving urge to adapt himself had made him use them to the extent that had been necessary. Now the men had put him on work that shriveled the mind, and did the muscles no good.

The old office boy came up to inspect his work, and Pan understood, looking at him, why the manager no longer wanted boys. The kid didn't know as yet that his job was being taken over, but thought he was in line for promotion, and was cocky enough for two. He seized the envelope rudely and ran it over the roller with a flourish.

"Awful dumb help they're sending out these days," he told the air. "Now I told you these had to go out tonight, and I find you loafing. Keep moving. You don't catch me laying down on the job. Ain't you never had work before?"

Pan looked at him, a side-long glance that choked off the kid's words, and fell to on the envelopes again. The air was getting the best of him. His head felt numb and thick, and his whole body was logy and dull. With what was supposed to be a chummy air, the boy sat his overgrown body on the desk and opened up his reservoir of personal anecdotes.

"Boy, you should 'a' been with me last night. Good-looking babes— Hm-m-m! Maybe they didn't like me, too. One little baby'd seen me work on the football team last year, and that didn't do me any harm. Best high school team in the State we had. You like football, guy?"

Pan's lips twitched. "No!" He redid an envelope that hadn't been properly wetted and reviewed the reasons for not committing mayhem on the boy. They were good reasons, but their value was depreciating with the passage of time in the

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stinking office, and with each new visit from the boy. The direct bluntness he longed to use came out a little in his voice, and the kid bounced off the table, scowling.

"O. K., don't let it get you. Hey, whatda you think stamps are? Don't tear them that way. Some of you hicks are ignorant enough to eat them."

The god caught himself on the table again, throbbing pains running through his head. There was a conference around the manager's desk and cigar smoke was being added to the thickness of the room. He groped out behind him for a stool, and eased himself down on it. Something sharp cut into him, and brought him up with a wild bellow!

The boy giggled. "Dawgonne, I didn't think you'd fall for it. Oldest trick there is, and you still sat right down on that tack. Boy, you should 'a' seen yourself."

Pan wasn't seeing himself, but he was seeing red. Homeric Greek is probably the most expressive of all languages, and his command of it included a good deal Homer had forgotten to mention. With a sharp leap, his head came down and his body jerked forward. He missed the horns, now, but his hard skull on the boy's midsection served well enough.

Sudden confusion ran through the office, and the manager rose quickly from his chair and headed toward the scene. Pan's senses were returning and he knew it was time to leave. The back door opened on an alley and he didn't wait to ask for directions.

THE OUTER AIR removed the last traces of his temper and sobered him down, but there was no regret in his mind. What was done was done, and there was no room in his philosophy for regrets. Of course,

word of it would get back to the employment agency, and he'd have no more jobs from them, but he wanted no more of such jobs. Maybe Apollo had the right idea in dying.

He made a slow meal in the restaurant, noting that Bailey was not there. He'd liked that young man. With a rush of extravagance, he bought a beer for himself and hung around, half waiting in hopes of Bailey's appearance and half planning for tomorrow; but nothing came of his plans.

Finally he got up and moved out into a little park across from the restaurant, just as darkness began to replace the twilight. Sleeping accommodations were the least of his worries. He found a large bush which concealed his body, and lay down on the ground under it. Sleep came quickly.

When he awoke, he found himself better for the sleep, though the same wasn't true of his clothes. He located his shoes and clamped his hoofs into them again, muttering dark thoughts about cobblers in general. If this kept up, he'd get bog spavins yet.

He made his way across to the restaurant again, where the waitress who was on at that hour regarded him with less approval than the other had. Out of the great pity of her heart, her actions said, she'd condescend to serve him, but she'd be the last to object to his disappearance. The sweet bun he got must have been well chosen for dryness.

"Hello there, old-timer." Bob Bailey's easy voice broke in on his gloom as the young man sat down opposite him. His eyes studied the god's clothes, and he nodded faintly to himself, but made no comment. "Have any luck yesterday?"

"Some, if you'd call it that." Pan related his fortunes shortly. Bailey grinned faintly.

"The trouble with you," Bailey said around a mouthful of eggs, "is that you're a man; employers don't want that. They want machines with self-starters and a high regard for so-called business ideals. Takes several years to inculcate a man with the proper reverence for all forms of knuckling under. You're supposed to lie down and take it, no matter how little you like it."

"Even empty fools who hold themselves better than gods?"

"That or worse; I know something about it myself. Stood all I could of a two-bit, white-collar job before I organized the Barnstormers."

Pan considered the prospect, and wondered how long it would take him to starve. "Slavery isn't what I'm looking for. Find your musician?"

"Not a chance. When they've got rhythm, they don't bother learning to play; and most of them don't have it. Smoke?"

Pan took the cigarette doubtfully, and mimicked the other's actions. He'd seen men smoking for centuries now, but the urge to try it had never come to him. He coughed over the first puff, letting out a bleat that startled the couple in the next booth, then set about mastering this smoke-sucking. Once the harsh sting of the tobacco was gone, there was something oddly soothing about it, and his vigorous good health threw off any toxic effect it might have had.

Bob finished his breakfast, and picked up the checks. "On me, Faunus," he said. "The shows should open in a few minutes. Want to take one in?"

Pan shook his head vigorously. The close-packed throng of humans

in a dark theater was not his idea of a soothing atmosphere. "I'm going over to the park again. Maybe in the outdoor air, I can find some idea."

"O. K., we'll make it a twosome, if it's all right with you. Time to kill is about the only thing I have now." As he paid the checks, Pan noticed that the man's pocketbook was anything but overflowing, and guessed that one of Bailey's difficulties was inability to pay for a first-class musician.

THEY FOUND a bench in the shade and sat down together, each thinking of his own troubles and mulling over the other's. It was the best way in the world of feeling miserable. Above them in a tree, a bird settled down to a high, bubbling little song and a squirrel came over to them with the faint hopes of peanuts clearly in its mind.

Pan clucked at it, making clicking sounds that brought its beady little eyes up at him quickly. It was a fat well-fed squirrel that had domesticated man nicely for its purposes, and there was no fear about it. When even the animals had learned to live with man and like it, surely a god could do as well.

He tapped his thighs slowly and felt the syrinx under his hand. The squirrel regarded him carefully as he drew it out, saw there was no bag of peanuts there, and started to withdraw. The first low notes blown from the reeds called it back, and it sat down on its tail, paws to its mouth in a rapt attitude that aped a critic listening to Bach.

Pan took courage, and the old bluff laughter fell from his lips. He lifted the syrinx again and began a wild quick air on the spur of the moment, letting the music roam through the notes as it would. There was no set tempo, but his feet tapped lightly on the graveled path, and the bird fell in step.

Bailey looked up quickly, his fingers twitching at the irregular rhythm. There was a wildness to it, a primitiveness that barely escaped savagery, and groped out toward man's first awareness of the fierce wild joy of living. Now the notes formed into a regular cadence that could be followed, and Bailey whistled an impromptu harmony. The squirrel swayed lightly from side to side, twitching his tail.

"Jitterbug, isn't he?" Bob asked, as Pan paused. "I've never seen music hit an animal that way before. Where'd you learn the piece?"

"Learn it?" Pan shook his head. "Music isn't learned—it's something that comes from inside."

"You mean you made that up as you went along? *Whew!* But you can play a regular tune, can't you?"

"I never tried."

"Uh. Well, here's one." He pursed his lips and began whistling one of the swingy popular things his orchestra played at, but never hit. Pan listened to it carefully, only half sure he liked it, then put the syrinx to his lips, beat his foot for time, and repeated it. But there were minor variations that somehow lifted it and set the rhythm bouncing along, reaching out to the squirrel and making it's tail twitch frenziedly.

Bailey slapped him on the back, grinning. "Old-timer," he chuckled, "you've got the corniest instrument there is, but you can roll it down the groove. I'd like to have the boys hear what a real hepcat can do to a piece."

Pan's face was blank, though the voice seemed approving. "Can't you speak English?"

"Sure. I'm telling you you're hot. Give the jitterbugs an earful of that and top-billing would follow after. Come on!"

Pan followed him, uncertain. "Where?"

"Over to the boys. If you can wrap your lips around a clarinet the way you do that thing, our worries are over. And I'm betting you can."

It was their last night's engagement at the Grotto a month later, and Pan stood up, roaring out the doggerel words in a deep rich basso that caught and lifted the song. Strictly speaking, his voice was a little too true for swing, but the boisterous paganism in it was like a beat note from a tuba, something that refused to permit feet to be still. Then it ended, and the usual clamor followed. His singing was a recent experiment, but it went over.

Bob shook hands with himself and grinned. "Great, Pan! You're hot tonight." Then he stepped to the microphone. "And now, for our last number, folks, I'd like to present a new tune for the first time ever played. It's called 'The Gods Got Rhythm,' and we think you'll like it. Words and music by Tin Pan Faunus, the Idol of the Jitterbugs. O. K., Tin Pan, take it!"

Pan cuddled the clarinet in his mouth and watched the crowd stampede out onto the floor. Bob winked at him, and he opened up, watching the dancers. This was like the rest, a wild ecstasy that refused to let them stay still. Primitive, vital, every nerve alive to the music. Even the nymphs of old had danced less savagely to his piping.

One of the boys passed a note over to his knee, and he glanced at it as he played. "Boys, we're set. Peterson just gave Bob the signal, and that means three months at the Crystal Palace. Good-by blues."

Pan opened up, letting the other instruments idle in the background, and went in for a private jam session of his own. Out on the floor were his worshipers, every step an act of homage to him. Homage that paid dividends, and was as real in its way as the sacrifices of old; but that was a minor detail. Right now he was hot.

He lifted the instrument higher, drawing out the last wild ecstasy from it. Under his clothes, his tail twitched sharply, but the dancers couldn't see that, and wouldn't have cared if they had. Tin Pan Faunus, Idol of the Jitterbugs, was playing, and that was enough.

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EIGHTY PERCENT

by WILLY LEY

An article on the mind—on what it is, and what it, seemingly, ought to be.

THERE are six people sitting on one of the stone benches in front of the public library. One is reading a book, another one is waiting for a business acquaintance and meanwhile thinking: "I'll get 12½ percent commission on $247.50, that's about $31.00, and then—" The third is telling the fourth: "I remember when—" The fifth is a young girl working on a crossword puzzle, and the sixth is trying to think of something to say to start a conversation with her.

But none of them knows, or is quite aware of the fact, that they make the most complicated structural apparatus known to humanity work: the human brain. As Professor C. Judson Herrick wrote recently in an article in the *Scientific Monthly (Vol. XLIX. No. 2.)*: "If all the equipment of the telegraph, telephone and radio of the North American continent could be squeezed into a half-gallon cup, it would be less intricate than the three pints of brains that fill your skull. More than half of this brain tissue is cerebral cortex—it is a sheet of grayish jelly spread over the convolutions of the cerebral hemispheres within which are embedded ten thousand million nerve cells. The possibilities of functional patterns of interconnections among these nervous elements are practically infinite. These arrangements are not haphazard; they are orderly."

All this weighs 1,400 grams or, roughly, three pounds on the average—which is high if you compare it with the brain of such an immense mammal as a whale that weighs only 2,000 grams. Only the large and intelligent elephant has a brain noticeably heavier than that of a man, averaging 5,000 grams for a full-grown specimen, probably the heaviest brain that ever existed on Earth. It weighs one hundred twenty-five million times as much as the brain of an ant, yet is not as intelligent as our 1,400 or 1,500 grams because it is surface that counts, not mass and weight.

Any medical book contains one or several pictures showing the appearance of that most intricate organ. And usually small print on certain parts indicate that these parts are "centers"—centers of vision, of hearing, of speech and of a good number of other things. The connection of these centers with certain abilities or with certain sense organs is so well established now that it cannot be doubted any more. "It has been shown that when light is thrown into the eyes, a particular portion of the brain increases its chemical activity, receives more blood and becomes warmer." (Quotation from an article by Dr. R. W. Gerard of the University of Chicago.) Other evidence was furnished by diseases, say brain tumors, that pressed on certain parts of the brain and decreased certain functions until the tumor was removed by operation. And, finally, World War No. 1 brought a large number of partial destructions of the

brains of soldiers—a deplorable but important opportunity to learn what happened when certain parts were destroyed.

The results were often very strange. Soldiers who had been well-educated people in private life suddenly could not read any more. They recognized the letters, but their combinations conveyed no meaning. Or they might not be able to understand their own spoken language any more while communication by writing went as smoothly and easily as if only the ears of a normal person were plugged. One case is on record of a German soldier who lost the faculty of understanding his own language. But in two years of warfare on French soil he had picked up a fair knowledge of spoken French —which he retained unimpaired.

It might be added that these losses—if the soldiers survived them at all—were usually only temporary losses; they again learned to write, to speak, to understand, even if somewhat slowly. And although the destroyed portions of the brain were not restored, as a man with both legs broken learns to walk again after the bones have healed together, the "method" of the body in all probability consisted of putting other areas of the brain to work for the lost areas.

Just how extensive certain areas are is still a matter of dispute. And as to the working mechanism of a brain that is trying to find an answer to a problem involving consideration of two dozen facts or factors, there are about as many theories as there are experts. In fact, there are a good many more theories—those concocted by nonexperts. That the duties performed by a good part of the brain's surface—the inside or white matter is merely what may be called telephone wires—are not yet known is not surprising; research on these problems is young. More startling is the assertion of a good many specialists that the normal human being does not make good use of his brain at all.

That sounds like a cynic's remark on the amount of intelligence possessed and displayed by the majority of the population, but it is meant only as a statement of a rather curious fact.

I do not think it is known exactly just how many muscles there are in the human body, but it is certain that most of them are used at least

a few times during the day. There are, of course, a few that are not used at all, such as those that can move the ears. And there are a good many that do not get as much exercise as they should, which, of course, makes them more and more useless as the years progress. But most of them work at least once in a while.

It is different with the gray matter of the brain. The average white person, even if mentally alert, it is claimed, never uses more than *ten percent of his brain*. And even highly educated people who work mentally all their lives, do not utilize more than twenty percent.

Of course, there might be some dispute about the exact percentage, but that is fairly unimportant. None, not even the most conservative among the physiologists who made this startling assertion, would allow for more than about one third even for Leonardo da Vinci, Millikan, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe or Charles Darwin.

The study of the brain, especially of the living brain is, as has been said, a new one. And while psychologists on the one hand are examining the *results* of the brain's actions, physiologists on the other hand build supersensitive electrical instruments to measure tiny nerve impulses and to find out at least *how* the nervous system ticks, if it is yet too difficult to learn what makes it tick. The third group, the surgeons, finally use the direct way of attack, making very careful and delicate operations removing bone splinters or tissue that does not belong there, and observe how the destructions wrought by disease or accident heal and how the damage is repaired.

All this is certainly interesting and also highly important for the welfare of the human race, but the really troublesome question concentrates not on what is known. It does not refer to that twenty percent that is in use. It reads: *What is the other eighty percent doing?*

We do not know.

We do not even have any really convincing theories. The only thing we can say with some certainty is that this eighty percent must be doing *something*. It cannot be stated definitely that nature *never* evolves a useless organ. That may happen, even though it is not very likely. It can be imagined, however, that a mutation, successful in one respect, may bring something else about which is not needed but retained by ordinary heredity just the same because it is not harmful. The point is that the body would not permit such an organ to stay useless for a long time. If a needless organ should be brought into existence, so to speak as a by-product, the body would soon thrust a duty on it. Not having been present as scientifically trained observers during the whole story of evolution, we cannot point to a particular organ of ours as an example. But there is at least one that might be suspected to be such a case—our pineal gland. What it is actually doing is still a mystery, but we know that it must be important because it cannot be removed without serious consequences.

The Frenchman, Cartesius—Descartes—thought that it was the abode of the soul. We are now very skeptical about souls—but we know that it was once an eye. There are still a few reptiles alive where that organ is close to the surface and looks as if it had ceased to do duty but recently, examples being the Tuatara or Hatteria (Sphenodon punctatus) from New Zealand and the black iguana (Amblyrhynchus

cristatus) from the Galàpagos Islands. In the case of the slow-worm (a legless lizard) of Continental Europe, the "third eye"—according to the Russian Professor Novikoff—can still distinguish light and shadow, and there is plenty of fossil evidence that the third eye was once functioning just like the two others. Between the period of duty as an eye and that of duty as a pineal gland—whatever that duty may be—there must have been a period of uselessness, although in all probability not for very long, else the "gland" would have been cast off completely.

Well—eighty percent of brain matter has been carried around since Cro-Magnon times (then possibly ninety to ninety-five percent) without being eliminated. If that does not constitute a unique case of retaining a completely useless organ, this eighty percent must be doing *something*.

It is obvious to think, in this connection, of those two violently defended and vigorously doubted abilities that are somewhat inappropriately termed "clairvoyance" and "telepathy." I am well aware of the possible reproach that looking at this eighty percent with a view of finding it to be the seat of telepathy and clairvoyance is about the same as Descartes' method of proclaiming the pineal gland to be the seat of the soul, because there is no other purpose known for it. But that one such guess was wrong does not necessarily mean that all other similar guesses have to be wrong, too. The abilities of telepathy and clairvoyance might be hidden in that terra incognita of the brain.

Before going any deeper into the matter it is necessary, however, to agree on the exact meaning of those terms. Telepathy is to mean mind reading or thought transference, i. e.

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the ability of being cognizant of somebody else's ideas and thoughts without employing any known means of communication. The term clairvoyance is sometimes used to mean the same, but wrongly because its use should be restricted to the meaning of perceiving hidden or distant things other than thought.

A simple example may serve to explain the main difference. If the great Oriental magician Ali Mahmud be Ismail ibn Suleiman tells you (correctly) that you have $17.00 in your wallet, which fact and sum is known to you or somebody else, it would be telepathy or mind reading. If he accomplishes the same feat of telling you the correct sum which you do *not* know yourself, it is clairvoyance. In the field of telepathy one might distinguish between the reception of thought the sender is willing to "send" and the "overbearing" of thoughts the sender does not care or even want to give away. There are more groupings in clairvoyance.

One group of clairvoyance—or ESP—"extra sensory perception," as it has been called by Professor Rhine of Duke University—has been termed "cryptoscopy" (seeing the hidden things) like the reading of post cards sealed in opaque envelopes or the recognition of playing cards face down on the table or even in a stack.

The second group is ESP in space, one of the famous examples being the feat of Swedenborg, who "saw" a fire in a city more than a hundred miles distant and who was able to tell his listeners correctly what houses were on fire.

The third group is ESP in time which sensitive and nervous people often claim to possess in saying that they "feel" that a murder was (or will be) committed in the room they just entered.

A fourth group would be an ESP in space *and* time, but it seems that that is rarely, if ever, claimed.

While many people are ready to believe in telepathy—usually in making the analogy with the sending and receiving of radio waves—very few are willing to accept ESP or clairvoyance. There can be no doubt, however, that at least "cryptoscopy" is an ability really existing in some people. It did not even need the famous Duke University experiments to prove that.* The merits of these experiments consist mainly in devising experimental ways and means to produce that ability at will, to check the results accurately and to determine by slightly varying the conditions whether clairvoyance or telepathy are at work.

There is no explanation for clairvoyance. As for the field of telepathy, the radio-analogy furnishes at least a theory of how it *might* work, even if that analogy should one day be proven fallacious. But there is none for "cryptoscopy." Any ex-

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* These experiments, performed mainly in the Psychological Laboratory of Duke University, consisted of the "guessing" of specially designed cards, called ESP cards. They show individually star, circle, plus or cross, rectangle (later changed to square) and wavy lines. These symbols were chosen because they are not only simple, but also very distinct and show no similarity to each other, not even in parts. One "deck" consisted of five cards of each type, i. e. twenty-five cards. While the law of averages makes it certain that there should be only five right guesses for each deck (especially in long runs of hundreds of trials) some specially gifted people were found among the students or friends of the teachers that made consistently more hits, usually about twice as many as the laws of chance would permit, oftentimes even more. The cards called were not known to the "checker" until **after** the "performer" had called them. This was the clairvoyance test. If telepathic ability was tested the "checker" knew the cards and concentrated upon the symbol in question. Calling not single cards in succession, but the whole, mechanically shuffled deck without removing a card for check up until all were called, was also often tried, with fair success. Very many distance tests were made. On the whole conditions and control were so rigid that the results cannot be explained save by assuming ESP. (See: "New Frontiers of the Mind," by J. B. Rhine.)

planation thinking of radiation—and comparing cryptoscopy in some way with normal vision—does not work, rather it has been ruled out by the experimental results themselves. No type of X ray could pick out several images (in succession) of symbols on cards stacked in a deck. There is no explanation for the perception of symbols on cards placed edgewise to the receiver. And it is significant and also somewhat "confusing" that asymmetrical symbols like letters were never perceived as mirror images, no matter what position they had.

If there exists a comparison at all, it might be with the sense of touch rather than that of vision. A blindfolded person could easily tell which objects have approximately the same warmth, no matter whether they are metal, stone or wood.

Whether the centers of clairvoyance and telepathy are really located in this unknown area nobody can tell; it's a guess, nothing more. Another guess as to the purpose of this area is that it is a gigantic storehouse of forgotten memories.

Everybody on occasion has found himself supplied with "forgotten" information. The face of somebody passing you on the street might make you remember a forgotten acquaintance with a surprising amount of detail. Or you might come to a place you have not seen for many years and begin to notice differences. That fence is now freshly painted and repaired, that wall shows a crack. Which means that your memory preserved pictures of a sound wall and an unpainted fence. You did not know about them until observation of the differences brought them to light.

The peculiar feature called "eidetical memory" apparently belongs in this category. There are people who remember pictures in every detail. Of course, you can learn a picture by heart, saying that in the left-hand corner there are three oak trees, then a river with a reflection of a church, then the church itself, et cetera, et cetera. But the man with eidetical abilities (the word is derived from the Greek verb for "to see") does not learn by heart. In looking at the picture, he impresses the picture itself in his brain so that he later sees it as a whole and is, for example, able to count the branches of those three oak trees and even the leaves (provided they are painted distinctly) without having the picture in front of his "outer" eyes.

To understand what that ability can accomplish, I ask every reader to get a book on paleontology from the shelf and look at the picture of the first known bird, archaeopteryx macrura from Solnhofen in Bavaria, the first of the two specimen found. The slab of stone had been found in 1861 and purchased by one Ernst Häberlein, M. D., who refused to part with it except for an excessively high price (he finally got from the British Museum £700/-/-). While bargaining, he did not permit the making of drawings, although experts were allowed to look at it. One Professor Oppel looked at the fossil very intently for a while, then he went home and made a drawing of it, correct in every detail. And the first scientific description (by Andreas Wagner) was based on that drawing.

The term "eidetical memory" was not yet invented, but there is no doubt that Oppel possessed it. It seems that most young children have this ability which apparently decreases with growth, so that only a few adults retain it. Our children today do not have sufficient intelligence to make use of that ability, but it might well be that in the youth of mankind eidetical memory played an important part. I personally believe that it accounts for the magnificence of those colored cave drawings such as were discovered, for example, in the cave of Altamira in Spain. Later, eidetical memory was apparently abandoned gradually in favor of what may be termed "intellectual memory," which remembers words and descriptions rather than pictures.

The peculiar mental attitude of some more primitive races in regard to their own drawings might have to do with that ability. African Negroes who draw a fairly recognizable picture of a bird perched on a tree never say that it is a "bird in a tree," but say that it is a specific bird that sat on a particular tree on the morning when this or that happened in the village. If the man had the technique of a Dürer or a Michelangelo, he would probably draw the particular bird and the particular tree so that they could be recognized—because that is what his mental eye really pictures when he is asked for a drawing of a bird in a tree.

Is this eighty percent of the brain, or part of it, a storehouse containing some five hundred thousand miles of film—picture, sound, smell and all—constituting a complete record of every impression that ever passed across the gateways to the brain, eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin?

It is practically certain that a part of our brain is such a storehouse, although it has to be said that it is usually in a deplorable state of disorder. The building is normally locked with the lock of forgetfulness. Large parts of it are again double and triple sealed with seals of repression. And the available records seem to be as well in order as a library where the books are stored according to size, no matter to what period, what branch of knowledge or what type of literature they belong. When dreams tap these sources they are bound to be chaotic, mixing memories of cold winters of twenty years ago with sensations of a cold draft touching the sleeper right then and intermingled with a number of illogical associations while some symbols, inhibitions and repressions are thrown in for good measure.

On the other hand it is, often enough, just such a haphazard and at the outset (seemingly or actu-

ally) not very logical combination that produces excellent results, especially in the realm of art. Those mental events that are called inspirations or intuitions are somewhat of the order of dreams. It must remain undecided (at least at present) whether the latent abilities of clairvoyance and, possibly, telepathy influence or even produce inspirations. That there are occasionally clairvoyant dreams cannot very well be doubted — unless clairvoyance be discarded in general—but that does not prove by any means that clairvoyance as well as "forgotten" memories occupy the same part of the brain.

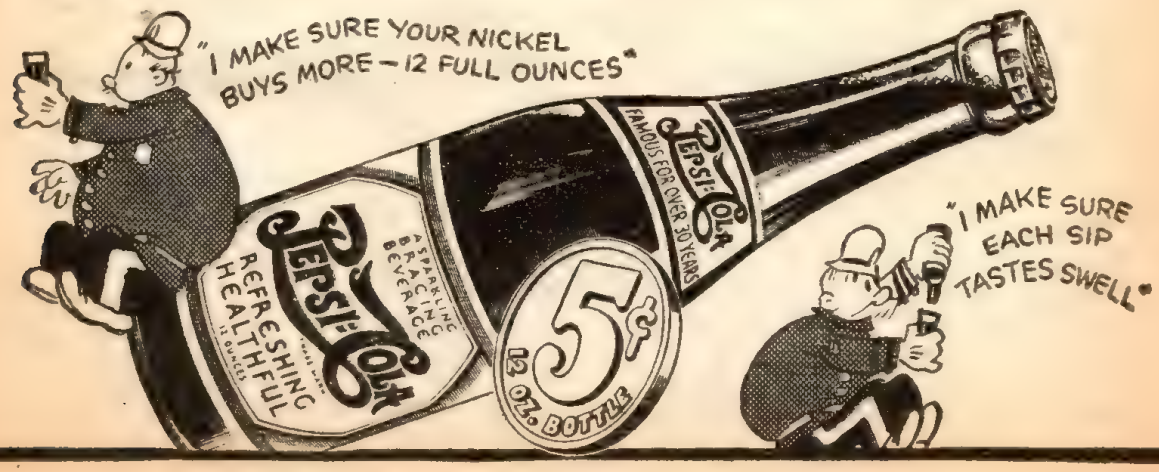
A small number of scientists hold the belief that what is possessed by present-day men of clairvoyant abilities is only a remainder from former times. Roughly speaking, these scientists—I am now thinking mainly of Dr. Edgar Dacqué and his school of thought—think that prehistoric man relied mainly on clairvoyant perception. Later, it is claimed, knowledge as we understand the term, replaced clairvoyant feeling—intuition was replaced by much hard work.

The majority of scientists stand firm in asserting that this reasoning is wrong. But the conclusion certainly holds true for any kind of scientific work. An intuition might show the way, but to proceed on it needs work, nothing but patient work. And that's the reason why we still are not able to tell what this eighty percent of our brain is doing. At best, there exist a few intuitive guesses what it might be. But the study of all these things has hardly started yet.

There were so many other things to do. The physical sciences had naturally to be investigated first, to provide tools for research and study, multitudes of facts of all kinds and, most important, methods. There was simply no time to do much about the mental sciences. But it seems that this territory is now to be attacked and in a few decades one may have to use fewer "ifs" and "buts" and "maybes" in discussing it.

But there are, too, troubles: in some six thousand years we have not yet learned how our usual mental functions operate. And they, seemingly, need but twenty percent of the brain.

We have eighty percent left that hasn't been more than noticed as "present—but not accounted for!"



The Reign of Wizardry

by JACK WILLIAMSON

PART III

In the days of Crete, the Mighty! Theseus—hero of Greek legend—finds the secret of the Dark One, the Minotaur— Illustrated by Edd Cartier

Before Greece was more than a wilderness, where semisavage tribes were struggling upward toward real civilization, the Island of Crete was the center of a mighty empire. Babylon was slipping downward, Egypt in one of her low periods—and

Minos, Emperor of Crete, ruled the world. A thousand years, legends said, he had ruled—and certainly he had ruled longer than the memory of any man. Three "walls" defended his empire, made Minos impregnable; the wooden walls of his navy, the brass wall of Talos, the Man of Brass, which, somehow, the wizardry of Minos had animated, and, finally, the wall of pure wizardry that had made Knossos, his capital, inviolable.

Theseus, a Greek forced to wander as an outlaw by the power of the Cretan armies and navies, was a pirate preying on Crete's trade—and slipping through their navy's defenses to attack again and again. Known as Captain Firebrand for his flaming hair, his whole aim in life is the destruction of Knossos, and its two cruel masters: Minos and the Minotaur, the half-bull, half-man creature, the Dark One of whom all—Cretan and Greek alike—live in unholy fear. Deep beneath the palace of Knossos, in the Labyrinth which is death and sacrifice to the Dark One to enter, lies the greatest power of Minos—fear! Fear of being sent to the Dark One!

Captain Firebrand captures a ship on which he finds a wizened, fearful little wizard, one Snish, who can, by magic, make himself appear in any form he desires. But Snish's spells, as Snish himself humbly admits, are weak ones. And since the Cretans have a monopoly of magic, furiously persecuting anyone who attempts to break in on their monopoly, Snish is fleeing constantly, but fruitlessly. He is pursued by ill luck and storms brought on by Cretan magicians. Snish's spell of disguise can be broken, unfortunately, by close contact or a kiss.

However, with the help of one of Snish's disguising spells, Theseus, by a ruse and the help of one of Snish's ill luck storms, gets past Crete's navy, passes even Talos, the Man of Brass, and reaches the city of Knossos in time for the games.

The games, in honor of the Dark One, are open to any contestant. If he wins three bouts—against man, bull, and "gods"—he displaces Minos, becomes the ruler of Crete, and takes Ariadne, Minos' daughter, as his queen. The games have, however, been going on for a thousand years—and Minos still rules. They are quite adequately "fixed."

However, with some aid from Snish at critical instants—his spells aren't strong enough to last long against the Cretan "gods"—their prime magicians, Minos, Ariadne, and Daedalus, Minos' adviser and chief magician, Theseus, still in his magic-disguised form, sufficiently unfixes the games to win them!

Determined to destroy the ruining, deadening reign of wizardry and fear Minos has imposed over all the then-known world, Theseus, still in his disguised form, goes to take formally the crown of Crete from Minos at the ceremonial banquet.

And at the ceremony, Ariadne kisses him—and Snish's disguising spell is broken. Having won the games in the disguised form, the revealed Theseus was not the winner—and is taken to the dungeons as the pirate Captain Firebrand, with a death penalty on his flaming head!

By a ruse, however, Theseus gets Admiral Phaistro, commander of the Cretan navy, to come to see him, and bring with him little Snish, the magician. In the darkness of the dungeon, with the aid of one of Snish's spells, Theseus assumes the admiral's guise, while the admiral is forced to assume Theseus'.

As the admiral, Theseus visits Ariadne at the Temple of Cybele, where Ariadne is high priestess. Ariadne, something of a magician herself, recognizes Theseus despite his disguise—and admits she loves him! Instead of giving him away, she gives him a tiny cylinder which, she says, is the key to the magic that protects the mighty palace city of Knossos, as proof of her love. Feeling himself unsafe, Theseus hides the cylinder deep in a crack in the massive rock on which the Temple of Cybele is built, and seeks to leave.

But somehow, Admiral Phaistro has resumed his natural appearance, and has succeeded in escaping from the dungeon, while, because of his close contact with Ariadne, Theseus' disguising spell has been broken.

Again he is captured, but now is taken before Minos, Daedalus, Minos' chief magician, and—Ariadne! Sitting as a high court, they condemn him to the Labyrinth of the Dark One—the fabled man-bull, who, legend says, eats both body and soul of his victims!

Before he goes down, Ariadne, seemingly in mockery, gives him a rolled parchment—the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Talos, the brass giant, lifts a mighty block of stone from the floor, and reveals the dark pit that is the entrance to the Labyrinth.

Theseus goes down, to wander in the absolute blackness of a vast, intricate limestone cavern. Hopelessly lost, in absolute dark, he wanders on, waiting momentarily

the attack of the Dark One—his only hope the fact that he found his own sword, the Falling Star, was wrapped in the parchment Ariadne had given him. Finally, in his wandering, he finds a single vast cavern room, in the center of which, his sense of touch tells him, is a stalagmite formation that resembles a vast, squatting manlike thing with a massive bull-head, with two rough, knobby horns. This then, is the legendary Dark One who rules all Crete by pure fear! A lump of limestone drippings!

And as he has at last determined that the Dark One doesn't exist—a voice speaks to him out of the darkness, and a huge, rough horn grazes his side!

XVIII.

That terrible horn grazed his naked flesh and lunged again. But Theseus automatically fended the second thrust away from his body with the Falling Star. For the horn came in like a heavy pike, and the instinct of many battles taught him how to deal with it, even in the darkness.

The Dark One fought like a man. Even the little grunt of effort, as the horn made its third ripping thrust, sounded queerly human—until the echo of the unseen dome amplified it into a far-off bellow.

Grim confidence returned to Theseus. A god that fought like a man could be slain like a man. He gripped the steel sword, let that smooth lunging point slide once more past his body, and thrust where a man must be to hold it.

But his foot, as he thrust, slipped into an unseen hole. He dropped forward on his face. His sword hand struck a sharp edge of rock, and the blade went clattering out of his fingers.

Pain from his ankle sickened him. He dragged himself back to his knees, groping desperately for the sword. He found only cold blades of stone. Cold dread stiffened him as he heard feet rush toward him, felt that lunging horn.

"Now, mortal Cretan!" That rolling, distorted bellow was still mockingly familiar. "Die to feed your god!"

Theseus dropped flat again, let the weapon pass above him.

"I'm no Cretan," he gasped. "And we Greeks have a different rule of hospitality—it is the guest who must be fed!" His voice became a whispered prayer. "Here, Falling Star!"

The echoes rolled into silence, and a startled hush filled the cavern, until:

"Greek?" breathed the other voice. "Falling Star?" The whisper was human, anxious, breathless. "You . . . you aren't— You can't be . . . Captain Firebrand?"

Abruptly, Theseus recognized that haunting familiarity. "Cyron!" he cried. "Gamecock—it's you!"

That long, heavy horn clattered on the rocks—and shattered, so that Theseus knew that it had been only a loose stalactite—and the Dorian pirate lifted him into a hairy embrace.

"It's good to find you, captain," sobbed the Gamecock. "Even though you have cost me a meal!"

"Better to find you," returned Theseus. "For I thought—half thought—that you really were the Dark One!"

"So I planned for every man they send down here to believe," whispered Cyron. "That ruse is all that has kept me alive, through the years since that metal giant dropped me through the portal—how many years has it been, captain, since my ship was taken?"

"No years," Theseus told him. "It's little more than two moons since I sailed our prize to meet the Cretan fleet with that little Baby-

"Ho! Captain Firebrand, eh? The whole guard looks for you!"

lonian wizard—remember him?"

"Two moons!" gasped the Gamecock. "No more than two moons? Captain Firebrand, I've been lost in this frightful darkness for half a lifetime, surely. The cold and wet of these slimy, stinking caves have made an old man of me. Else the horn of the Dark One would have gored you through with the first lunge!"

"And you have met no Dark One," whispered Theseus, "save yourself?"

"I was half dead with terror," Cyron said, "when that metal monster tossed me into the Labyrinth. All the warlocks had promised me that their god would be waiting to devour me. But in all the years—or the two moons, if it can be so brief a time—there has been no god here but myself. I have played the Dark One only because even here a man must eat."

THESEUS had found the Falling Star. His fingers caressed the polished pattern of the inlay in the cold hilt, the smooth clinging edge of the blade. In a soft, breathless voice he said: "Then there is no Dark One?"

"Not here, Captain Firebrand," said Cyron. "Though I had been crawling and leaping and climbing through these haunted galleries for half a lifetime—so it seemed—before I guessed it."

His fingers were touching the arms and the shoulders and the face of Theseus, like those of one blind. "It is good to find you, captain," he whispered.

"So there is no Dark One!" Theseus murmured softly.

"Some chance freak of water and stone must have made this half likeness of a bull-headed man," Cyron said. "And some ancient Cretan, lost in these caves, found it. He was already afraid, and his own frightened cry echoed into the bellow of an angry bull. So the Dark One was born! Or so at least, after this weary time, the truth seems to me."

Theseus gripped the Falling Star. "The Dark One is a lie!" A newborn power rang in his voice. "All the sway of Crete—all the dominion of wizardry—is built upon a lie! It is fear that sits upon the throne of Minos. Fear that is the blade of wizardry. And fear without cause!"

He stood up, clutching the sword. "This truth is the weapon I have sought, Gamecock. We shall carry it back to the world above. For it is the sword that can scatter all the minions of Minos. It is the torch that can fire the wizardry of Knossos!"

Cyron grunted cynically. "Minos would not encourage you to speak," he said. "Nor would his subjects dare believe your blasphemy." He sat down on the wet stone. "Anyhow, it is an idle question, because we can't get out."

"We can try," said Theseus. "Now we have a reason."

"For all this time I've had a reason," muttered Cyron. "And I've tried. There's no way out. None save the portal through which we entered—and only the brass giant can open that."

Theseus rubbed at the stubble on his chin. "There's another way," he said. "You've just proved it."

"I?" Hope struggled with Cyron's doubt. "How?"

"When you spoke of the birth of the Dark One. Before the Dark One was known, you said, some lost Cretan must have wandered unwittingly into this evil temple."

"Well?" said Cyron.

"He didn't wander through the

passage by which we entered," Theseus told him, "because that is a hewn stair that must have been planned by architects and cut by the labor of many men. Their masters must have known of the cavern already. So there must be an older, natural entrance!"

The Dorian grunted hopelessly. "Perhaps there is—or was two thousand years ago. But we've no way of finding it. I have followed a hundred winding passages away from this place of the Dark One—and always, in the end, here I am again!"

His teeth chattered, and his voice sank hoarsely. "Sometimes, Captain Firebrand, I think there is a real evil power in this horned stone, that guides men here to die, for the cavern floor about it is spongy with rotting bones."

Cold, shuddering, his fingers gripped the arm of Theseus. "Perhaps there *is* a Dark One!" he muttered. "Perhaps the deity merely lets us deny him for a jest, until, after a thousand blind circles, he brings us back to lay our bones before him."

"Don't say that—for there is no Dark One!" But the voice of Theseus trembled uneasily. "Come—at least, we can search for a way."

"I'll wait for you here," muttered Cyron. "In a day or two—with the Dark One for a guide—you'll be back—and thinking you had almost escaped." He grunted. "Perhaps when you come—if the warlocks have fed their god again—I'll have meat for you."

Theseus was silent for a little time. "I think I know how to find the way," he whispered at last. "The Falling Star will guide us!"

"A sword!" muttered Cyron. "It can't speak!"

"It has guided me across the desert and across the sea," Theseus told him. "My father told me that the metal of it fell out of the northward sky. And still, when it is hung by a hair, its point seeks the North Star."

Cyron grunted doubtfully. "Perhaps you can tell the directions, as you used to at sea," he muttered, "but what good is that, when we don't know which way to go?"

"Perhaps," Theseus said slowly, "I do. Anyhow, the Dark One will not turn us back unawares."

Cyron rose reluctantly. "Then lead the way," he said gloomily. "It will be a long one, for men stumbling in the dark. And probably—in spite of your sword—it will end here before this evil figure."

Theseus had pulled a single long hair from his head. He tied it carefully around the steel blade, at the little nick where it balanced. He waited patiently for the swinging sword to come to rest, then touched it with his fingers.

"This is the way that we must go." He held the blade, for Cyron to feel its direction. "On beyond the horned rock."

THE DORIAN followed him. It was not easy to hold any direction, even approximately. They came to blind endings, had to turn back, swing the blade again, try another corridor.

They both were weak from hunger, shuddering and stiff and numb with cold. Raw feet left unseen blood upon the rocks. Sharp ledges cut their naked bodies.

Cyron wanted to turn back. "I was never the resolute man that you are, Firebrand," he muttered. "I like a good fight—but a good meal more. And, if I go back to the Dark One, Minos will send me one. You are too hard, Firebrand. You are hard, bright metal, like your blade—hard enough to fight the gods."

"And," Theseus whispered grimly, "to conquer them!"

"Then go on," Cyron told him. "I am turning back."

"Not now, Gamecock," said Theseus, and touched him with the Falling Star's point. "You are coming with me—one way or another."

Cyron started, rose stiffly. "Then I'll come alive," he gasped apprehensively. "Put away the sword! I know you jest, Firebrand—hope you jest." His teeth chattered. "But you're a hard man and set on your purpose. I'll come with you!"

They climbed on, through endless dripping passages. They swam foul black pools and crawled on their faces through slimy crevices, explored blind pockets and retraced their way, and forever swung the sword again to keep the same direction.

Then the time came when Cyron fell and would not rise again. "I'm done, Captain Firebrand," he whispered feebly. "Slit my throat and drink my blood, and you can go on. But I am done. There may be a way—but only light could show it to us."

"Then," Theseus said, "we shall have light."

Wrapped about his neck, where it was dry from his body heat, he had carried the papyrus scroll in which Ariadne had concealed the Falling Star. Tucked in it was a hard flint pebble, that he had brought from the cave

Theseus lit a corner of the papyrus and watched the slow drift of the smoke. Somewhere it must drift out of this Labyrinth—

of that monstrous stone.

He shredded a corner of the scroll, struck sparks from the flint with the Falling Star's hilt. The papyrus smoldered, burst into flame—the first gleam that Theseus had seen in all the Labyrinth.

"Light!" sobbed Cyron. "A light!"

"The book of the dead," said Theseus. "But it can guide the living."

They went on. Theseus extinguished the tiny torch, when it had shown them a possible path. A dozen times he lit it, and put it out—and always watched the smoke. At last there was a feeble drift aside. They followed it. And when the little flame went out again, the dark was not complete. There was a gray, lingering gleam.

Day!

Breathless and trembling, they climbed toward it. But a great boulder, sometime in the ages, had slipped to block the passage. The narrow open fissure would not admit their bodies.

Weak with exhaustion and want, ill with despair, they lay down under that tiny precious light. Slowly it faded above them, and there was only darkness. It seemed to Theseus, drifting into dull oblivion, that this must be the last night.

But he woke, presently, filled with a new hope and strength. A pale ghostly light was filtering again through the fissure, and it guided the point of the Falling Star. Weathered stone chipped and crumbled, and presently Theseus shook the inert limp form of Cyron. "Come on," he whispered. "The way is open."

His words roused the sleeping Dorian, magically. They squeezed through the passage that Theseus had cut, and climbed ragged lips of stone, and came out into a tiny beehive building.

Precious white moonlight poured through the pointed entrance arch. It washed the rush-covered floor, and flooded a tiny altar, where lay offerings of dates and barley cakes, a piece of smoked fish, a bowl of pickled olives, and a jar of sour wine.

"Where—" gasped Cyron. "What—" He fell before the altar, snatched the fish.

"This is the shrine of Cybele," Theseus told him. "The Cretans believe that their goddess was born of the earth and the Dark One, through the way we have come, to be the mother—" His mouth was full of dates, and he spoke no more.

The full moon stood high in the heavens, when at last they reeled drunkenly through the pointed arch. The olives of the sacred grove made black shadow masses under its silver flood. The Kairatos Valley lay dark and broad beneath it, and the sleeping city of Ekoros sprawled brown about the sinister hill of slumbering Knossos.

"We have come alive from the Labyrinth." The voice of Theseus was hushed and savage, and his hand quivered on the Falling Star. "And we have brought back the secret that will conquer Crete!"

Swaying with the wine, Cyron spat date seeds and grunted cynically. "But we have no token of proof," he muttered. "And blasphemy is the blackest crime. They would send us straight back to the Dark One—and make certain that we stayed!"

XIX.

THESEUS CLIMBED a little way back into the passage. He fumbled in a cavity, and found the thing he had left there—the tiny graven cylinder of the wall of wizardry, strung upon its silver chain. He fastened it about his neck.

Cyron, meantime, had wrapped the remainder of the food up in the altar cloth. They left the shrine, and dawn found them in an abandoned, brush-grown vineyard on the summit of a little rocky hill.

There they spread out their loot, and split the linen cloth to wrap their loins. The cool open air was incredibly fragrant and good, after the fetor of the caverns, and the rising sun was thankful to their long-chilled bodies.

They lay in the sun all morning, one eating and watching while the other slept. In the afternoon they found the thin shade of a gnarled abandoned apple tree, and Theseus talked of his plans, countering the muttered objections of Cyron.

"The Cretans won't believe us," Cyron maintained, "for every man who does thereby condemns himself to the Labyrinth."

"Perhaps," said Theseus, "but there are men who will believe—our pirates! They are slaves, now—those who are left alive—in the compounds of Amur the Hittite—so I learned when I was admiral. They'll believe."

Cyron wriggled his hairy brown body under leaf-filtered sun. "They might," he muttered. "But what if they do? They are a mere handful, starved and tortured and laden with chains, already beaten by the power of Crete."

"Then they have reason enough to rise," said Theseus. "As all the Cretans have! And the truth we bring will cut their fetters and be their swords. *There is no Dark One*—those very words will conquer Minos!"

"They are good ringing words," admitted Cyron, "but what are any words, against Phaistro's galleys and marines, and the Etruscan mercenaries, and the brass might of Talos, and all the power of the Cretan gods?"

Theseus fingered the hilt of the Falling Star. "The Dark One was the greatest god of Knossos," he said, "and we have conquered him." A faint smile of eagerness touched his drawn, stubbled face. "The vessel of Cybele has yielded." His face turned hard again. "There are only Minos and the warlock Daedalus and the Man of Brass—and, like the Dark One, they shall die!"

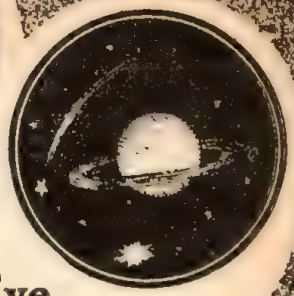
They left the vineyard when the sun had set, and walked down a road toward Ekoros. Theseus accosted a sweat-stained laborer returning homeward with his hoe, and asked directions toward the slave compounds of Amur the Hittite.

"That's a strange question!" The farmer looked at them curiously. "Most men are more anxious to leave the pens than to find them. But, if tithes and taxes force you to sell yourselves to Amur, take the left turn beyond the olive grove and cross the second hill—and watch that his guards don't kidnap you and drink up your price!"

Dusk thickened to night, and the full moon came up beyond the purple eastward hills, before they came to the slave compound. A tall palisade inclosed it, and guards leaned on lances at the entrance gate.

Dropping to all fours, Theseus and Cyron crept silently up through the weeds outside the barrier. Through the poles, they watched the chained slaves being driven in from the long day's toil.

All the fields about, the farmer had told them, the orchards, gardens, the vineyards, belonged to Amur. His were the brickyards, the pottery, the looms, the smelter. And all his



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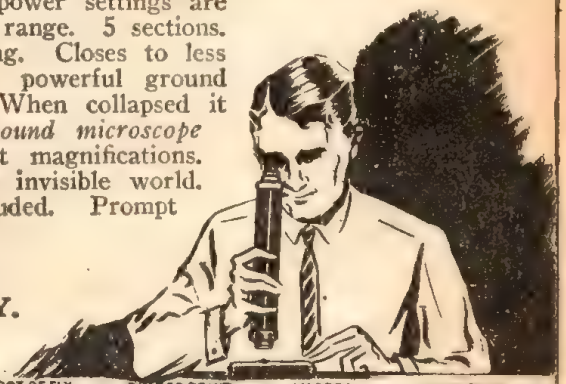

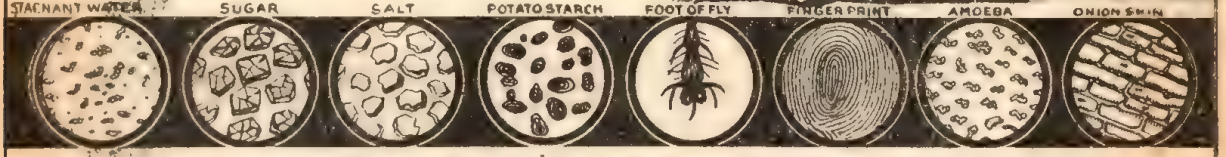

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"There is no Dark One— There is no Dark One—" The roar of the revolting slaves became a battle cry.

slaves were penned here, like cattle, for the night.

The wind changed, and brought a sour, sickening odor.

In an open place, between the flimsy barrack sheds and the stone trough where the slaves were allowed to drink like horses, a fire burned low. In the bed of coals stood a huge pottery urn, taller than a man, soot-blackened. The urn rang, at intervals, with a dull and muffled scream of agony.

The Gamecock's lacerated hands were clenched.

"There's a man in the pot!" he

whispered. "But what can we do?" His hairy body shivered in the weeds. "Two men, with one sword—against that wall and twoscore of guards! We'll be roasting, ourselves, in Amur's pot!"

"We have the Falling Star!" breathed Theseus. "We have at least one ally within—the one-eyed man, chained to yonder post, is our Tirynthian cook, Vorkos. And we have a battle cry—*There is no Dark One!*" He gathered himself to rise. "Come on to the gate!"

But the pirate caught his arm. "Wait, Captain Firebrand!" he whispered hoarsely. "Here come fighting men!"

He pointed, and Theseus saw torches flaring on the road from Ekoros. Light glittered on the tips of lances. A silver horn snarled. Theseus and the Dorian dropped back in the weeds, to watch.

The torches came up to the compound's gate. A squad of Amur's yellow-belted guards led the way. Behind them four slaves carried the Hittite's yellow-curtained palanquin. Behind the palanquin marched a group of black Minoan priests, with lances.

Amur's voice rasped to the guards by the gate: "I have promised a gift to the gods. Three strong youths and three beautiful girls. They will be trained for the next bull vaulting, and any that survive will go to feed the Dark One. For the gods have favored me. My enemy, Phaistro, has gone to the Labyrinth for treason. And I am the admiral of Crete!"

His voice was a feral snarl. "Quick, officer! Light torches and drag out the strongest young men and the most beautiful girls—those that came in the last ship from the north—so that the priests of Minos can choose."

In the shadows, Theseus touched the arm of Cyron. "Wait," he whispered, "until the slaves are brought."

"I'll wait." The Dorian shuddered. "Even longer!"

Torches moved beyond the sharpened poles. Guards herded groups of slaves out of the barrack huts, made them stand in long lines. Still, at intervals, a hollow scream of agony came from the huge black urn.

Theseus heard the snarl of Amur: "The Northman still lives, after a day and a night in the pot? These pirates are tough sticks to break. But Gothung's fate will be a lesson to them to jump when the whip snaps."

Cyron tensed and shivered. "Gothung!" It was a muted, savage breath. "My steersman and my friend! Come, Captain Firebrand—we have waited long enough!"

"But silently," whispered Theseus. "Until we reach the gate."

With the hairy bearded Dorian stalking at his arm, Theseus came to the compound's entrance. The tall wooden gate had not been closed since Amur's coming. Half a dozen guards stood about their watch fire, just within. It was a hundred paces to the central opening, where the urn sounded hollowly and the black priests were selecting their victims.

Well within the gate, where the light of the watch fire showed them plainly, Theseus paused and checked Cyron. He flourished the Falling Star, so that the fire shone red against its bright steel, and shouted:

"Halt! There is no need to send more boys and girls to die in the Dark One's game—none to send them into the Labyrinth to feed him. Because the Dark One is dead!"

A breathless, startled silence fell over the compound. Slaves and

guards alike paused to stare, dumfounded. Theseus stalked forward, with Cyron at his side, so that the watch fire cut them in silhouette.

"I am Captain Firebrand!"

The sword was lifted again, and his voice peeled into the hush: "Here, with me, is Cyron the Gamecock. You all know that we both were flung into the Labyrinth, to face what your lying priests call the justice of the Dark One. Well, the Dark One met Athenian justice, instead."

The sword flashed crimson. "There is no Dark One—and never was! All the power and the wizardry of your masters is set upon a lie. Rise, slaves! Join us, fighting men!" His voice had a war horn's ring. "Comrade pirates, avenge Gothung! Down with Minos! Set men free from wizardry!"

That challenge broke Amur and the black priests out of their paralysis. Angry voices cracked. The eight priests, with lances leveled, came charging toward the gate. And Amur screamed a command for the guards there to seize the intruders.

The guards hung back, however, obviously impressed by the challenge of Theseus. Only their captain, after his men had failed to obey the command, rushed at Theseus with his long sword lifted. Steel met bronze, and the old delight of battle turned steel to lightning. The captain fell, and Theseus cried again:

"There is no Dark One!"

"That is blasphemy!" screamed the leader of the charging priests. "The Dark One will blast him down!"

But Theseus did not fall. He went on to meet the black priests. And Cyron, snatching the sword and shield of the fallen captain, followed him.

"Rise, comrades!" called the pirate. "Remember Gothung! There is no Dark One!"

Hoarsely, somewhere in the barrack sheds, that cry was repeated. It ran along the waiting lines of slaves. It echoed. It grew into a bellow of furious revolt. The slaves fell upon the guards, fighting with their very chains.

Theseus and Cyron met the black-clad lancers. Two against eight. But the first hewing sweep of the Falling Star cut the shaft of a lance, left a useless stick in the hands of the foremost priest. Cyron caught another on his shield, and his bronze blade ripped a throat. Then the guards came running behind them, echoing:

"There is no Dark One!"

That war cry rang through mad confusion. It pealed above screams and moans and hoarse commands and the furious clash of weapons. Not half the guards joined the revolt, nor half the slaves broke their chains, and for an endless time the issue hung in doubt.

Theseus battled in a mad world of fire and reeking blood and stinging sweat and smoke and darkness and weariness and screaming pain—and savage elation turned the Falling Star to a live and terrible thing in his red hands.

"Fire the barracks!" shrieked Amur, when the decision turned against his men. "Let them roast—to the glory of the Dark One!"

Amur's guards ran with torches among the flimsy, reed-thatched huts, in which half the slaves still were chained, and turned them to roaring pillars of yellow death. Red madness flickered back from Amur's close-set eyes, and he screamed from the yellow-curtained palanquin:

"Drive them all into the fire—the Dark One will find them there!"

But the mutineers had caught a new flame of strength and valor. Even the slaves in the burning huts broke their fetters, or pulled up the posts to which their chains were fast, and came out fighting.

The Falling Star cleft the skull of a black lancer. And Theseus discovered that the battle was done. The Minoan priests were dead, and all the guards who had not joined the mutiny.

Cyron gripped his quivering arm. "Catch your breath, Captain Firebrand!" gasped the red-dripping pirate. "You have earned it!"

Theseus wiped his blade and stared around him. The victorious survivors of the mutiny—in all, nearly two hundred men and women, slaves and former guards—were crowding away from the still-flaming ruins of the barracks, into the open area.

Screams of agony bubbled hollowly in the huge black jar.

"Gothung!" choked Theseus. "Still—living!"

He started toward the jar. But Vorkos, the one-eyed Tirynthian cook, was building up the fire about it. He pointed to a brown, shapeless thing beside the coals.

"That's our comrade," he said. "It's Amur in the pot—and never I fanned my fire with a better will!"

Theseus walked among the survivors, greeting those who had been with him on the pirate galley. Then he mounted a pile of fagots, near where Amur screamed, and said:

"Men and women! You were slaves—but you have fought, and you are free. The thing that set you free is a truth that the Gamecock and I brought back from the Labyrinth. Don't forget—"

"There is no Dark One!"

A shout of elation, the response

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rolled back: "There is no Dark One!"

Theseus lifted the Falling Star. "You were slaves, and now you are free. But your freedom is still in danger. Because you have other masters—other enemies. Remember—their only power is the lie of the Dark One!

"Minos will come against us, now, with his hired Etruscan killers. He will attack us, with all the tricks of his lying wizardry. But there is no Dark One—that is the truth that will destroy the warlocks.

"Now patch up your wounds. Strike off your fetters. Arm yourselves, from the men we have slain. But don't forget that your best weapon is that one truth—there is no Dark One!"

A chant of victory rolled up into the smoky night: "There is no Dark One!"

Theseus stepped down from the pile of wood beside the screaming urn, and Cyron caught his arm. Hoarse from shouting in the battle, the pirate's voice was strained with new apprehension.

"Captain Firebrand!" he gasped. "The flames must have warned the warlocks! For the scouts we sent are already back. They say that the Etruscans are already marching here from Knossos—four hundred strong—to wipe us out!"

XX.

"And the Etruscans," Cyron went on anxiously, "can't be defeated by the simple truth that there is no Dark One. They fight for hire, and Minos lets them practice their own grim worship, without regard for the Dark One."

The keen eyes of Theseus swept the high palisade, the red coal beds where the barracks had been, the huddled battle-weary mutineers. His bare shoulders drew straight, and his

hand went hard on the Falling Star.

"If the Etruscans fight for hire," he said, "they will fight for us when we have taken the treasury of Knossos."

Cyron stared and grunted doubtfully.

"A hundred men," Theseus told him, "can hold the palisade until the dawn, even against a thousand. I am going to leave you to hold it. I'll take sixty men and slip past the Etruscans and storm the palace tonight."

"Tonight?" breathed Cyron.

"Crete had three gods," rang the low voice of Theseus. "One of them still stands against us. Minos must die—tonight!"

Cyron studied his face in the fire glow and looked uneasily toward Knossos. "A hundred men," he said, "could hold the compound—against the Etruscans. But Minos may send lightning to fire the walls! Or the brass man to break them down!"

"You needn't fear that," Theseus promised him grimly. "I'll keep Minos and all his wizardry busy at Knossos."

But the hairy pirate caught his arm again. "I wish you wouldn't leave me, Captain Firebrand." His voice was unsteady, choked. "We have been comrades in many dangers." He gulped. "Let . . . let us take all who will follow and fight our way to the harbor town. We can be at sea by dawn, in the best galleys of Crete!"

"You shall have them, Gamecock—when we have taken Knossos," promised Theseus. "Now I am going to call for sixty willing men, to loot Knossos and end the domination of wizardry."

He climbed back to the pile of wood, and called for the volunteers, and waited. But none came forward.

"We can fight men," muttered the one-eyed Tirynthian cook. "But you ask us to make war on wizards and gods and a giant of brass!"

The Falling Star burned red in the fire glow.

"And they can be destroyed!" shouted Theseus. "The Dark One was the greatest god of Crete—and the Dark One was a lie! Blind fear is the sword and the yoke of wizardry—and it is fear of tricks and lies!

"Follow me—and remember there is no Dark One! The warlocks and the gods will fall before us. Even the brass man cannot stand against that truth. Now, who will come with me to claim the loot of Knossos?"

After a little uneasy pause, the one-eyed Tirynthian cook limped forward alone. "I'll go with you, Captain Firebrand," gasped Vorkos. "We must destroy the warlocks, as you say—or we shall be destroyed."

Theseus pointed at the tall black urn. "It is a law of Minos," he said, "that slaves who kill their masters shall die by slow torture. The pot is silent now. We must kill Minos tonight!"

That grim reasoning brought forward a steady trickle of men. Most of the surviving pirates came, and even a few of the former guards. Half a score of the blond Northern slave girls joined them. At first Theseus thought to stop the women. But when he saw the look upon their faces, and the way they carried their well-stained weapons, he let them come.

When the sixty were gathered, he led them to the gate, and turned back to promise Cyron: "When you see flames above Knossos, you can tell the hired Etruscans that their wages are stopped!"

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The bearded Dorian came, blinking and blowing his nose, to embrace him. Then the tall gate creaked shut behind them. Theseus led the sixty in single file down a dry moonlit ravine toward the Kairatos River.

THEY LAY HIDDEN in black pools of shadow while the torches of the Etruscans marched along a hill above them. Then, silently—as the pirates had learned to march in a hundred midnight raids—they moved on through sleeping fields and dark groves and shadow-clotted vineyards.

One of the Cretan guards—who had joined them because Amur had given a girl slave whom he loved to the Minoan priests—silenced the barking dogs with his bow. There was no alarm, and at last the looming bulk of Knossos rose against the moonlit sky before them.

The palace was not a fortress. The first of its fabled walls was the fleet in the harbor, three miles away. The second was brazen Talos, whom they had not seen. The third—if Theseus could believe Ariadne—was the little talisman that he wore at his throat.

He had studied the tiny object, that afternoon. To the eye it was no more than a common seal cylinder, cut of dead-black steatite, pierced lengthwise. Its design, engraved with an exquisite perfection, showed a bull-headed giant, seated on a throne, with men and women kneeling.

Was this, really, the wall of wizardry? His mind had dwelt upon the riddle. Had Ariadne told the truth about its power? Could it really give him Knossos? If the Dark One himself did not exist, what power could lie in a mere picture?

The green-eyed loveliness of Ariadne had haunted Theseus, through all the dark passages of the

Labyrinth. He couldn't make up his mind about her. She had been a scornful enemy—yet she had risked much to give him the Falling Star, so had saved his life.

Vessel of Cybele, she should know the illusion of love. In her thousand years or so, she must have loved too many men for any one to matter greatly. She was a member of the strange pantheon of Crete, and she knew that he planned to shatter her world. It was sheerest madness, he knew, to hope for any aid from her.

Yet the talisman was hanging at his throat, and her red-haired loveliness was smiling at him. Something mocked him, from her smile. Theseus tried to thrust it from his mind, and whispered to his sixty in the shadow of Knossos:

"We must destroy Minos, all his priests and warlocks, and the giant of brass. Daedalus must die—he is the most terrible wizard! But spare the slaves, the artisans, and all the common people—set them free with the word that there is no Dark One!"

"Aye, Captain Firebrand," whispered the one-eyed Tirynthian.

"There are two others you must spare," ordered Theseus. "One of them is Ariadne, the daughter of Minos, who is the vessel of Cybele—she gave me the Falling Star, to slay the Dark One.

"The other to be saved—if we happen to find him—is a small Babylonian wizard, called Snish the cobbler—because he is my friend."

THE PIRATES were well versed in the methods of raids by night. The sixty came up the hill as silently as shadows, and reached the artisan's entrance. There was a short, savage battle with the Etruscans in the wardroom, but the most of them died before they were fully awake. Snatching new arms from the arsenal there, the sixty fought their way into the corridors beyond.

"There is no Dark One!" The battle cry pealed through the ancient halls. "Theseus, the Firebrand, destroyed him! Join us, to take the loot of Knossos! For the gods are doomed!"

Bewildered men and women swarmed excitedly out into the halls and fled again. A few of the palace artisans came to join Theseus, but most of them were too startled to do anything at all. Sleepy, swearing Etruscan soldiers and black lancer-priests gathered hastily at points of vantage ahead.

Five stories high and six acres in extent, with its maze of courts and light wells and corridors and stairs and magazines, a thousand years in the building, Knossos was itself a second Labyrinth, as confusing as the limestone galleries of the Dark One's cavern temple.

Theseus himself was lost. But the artisans, and a slave who had served in the imperial household, pointed out the way toward the apartments of Minos. The sixty crushed through the stubborn groups of priests and Etruscans, fighting toward it.

The quick success of the raid began to seem slightly ominous to Theseus. His men met no barriers of wizardry, caught no glimpse of brazen Talos. And they pushed through to the megaron of Minos.

The Etruscans had gathered at the entrance for a final desperate stand. But elation of victory had turned the Falling Star to a darting flame of death, and the pirates followed it as they had done in a hundred other fights. The last Etruscan fell, and Theseus led his band through the splendid frescoed hall and into the bedchamber of Minos.

The startled ruler sat up on his

magnificent canopied couch. Trembling and pale, his fat hands dragged the fine Egyptian linen up about his pink fat body, as if it could shield him from the dripping sword of Theseus.

The round baby-face had turned pale as the clutching hands, and it was not dimpled now. The little blue eyes had lost their merry twinkle, and terror glazed them. Thin and shuddering, the woman-voice shrilled:

"Spare me, Captain Firebrand! Spare my life, and all I have is yours to take. My treasury, my fleet, my empire! Only spare my life!"

Theseus held his lifted sword. He had come to kill a warlock. Here was only a fat old man, quaking with fear. Anger crackled in his voice: "Find a weapon! Fight for your throne!"

But Minos had gone speechless. A gross mass of pink flesh, he tumbled out of bed and sprawled, quivering and gasping, on the rugs. The light of the torches flickered over him. Theseus still withheld the sword.

"So this is the god Minos?" Scorn choked him. "The warlock who has reigned a thousand years, whose double ax is feared in Egypt and Cathay!" The Falling Star trembled in his hand. "I came here to kill you, Minos—to end the reign of wizardry. But I have never struck a kneeling, weeping man—"

"But I have, Captain Firebrand!" Vorkos, the one-eyed Tirynthian, strode forward. "Lend me your blade!"

He snatched the Falling Star. The bright steel hissed down. Severed cleanly, the white head of Minos rolled away from the gross quaking body, stared up mutely.

Head and body changed!

The Tirynthian dropped the Falling Star, staggered backward. Muttering fearfully, the pirates began to retreat toward the door. Theseus picked up the sword. He snatched a torch from a shuddering hand and bent to examine the thing that had been Minos.

Body and head were yellowed, waxen-pale, shrunk almost to naked bones. The body had been nearly bloodless—only a few black drops spilled from the severed arteries and veins. Only sorcery, Theseus knew, could have kept life in such a frame.

And the corpse—most incredible thing—was a woman's!

Theseus strove to put down the crawling fear that hideous sight had set in him. He tried to hold the steel blade steady in his hand, gulped vainly at the dry hoarseness in his throat.

"See!" he croaked at his apprehensive followers. "Minos is dead!" He pointed with the black-dripping blade, and it trembled. "And he was no god. He wasn't even a man. He was only an old, old woman!"

He moved with the torch toward the door. "We have conquered the gods of Crete!" He licked at his dry lips and tried again to swallow that hoarseness. "We have earned the loot of Knossos!"

"No, Captain Firebrand." The voice of the one-eyed cook was a rasp of dread. "The victory isn't won! For there is still the giant of brass, whose great feet can tramp us like vermin. There is still the wizard Daedalus, whose very glance can poison men. And still the daughter of Minos, who is a goddess and a sorceress."

Theseus dragged his eyes away from the shriveled, yellowed thing that had been Minos. "Ariadne is my friend—my lover," his dry whisper rasped. "Once she saved my life. Now we must find her—for

her sorcery can aid us against the brass man and the wizard Daedalus."

He wiped the Falling Star and led his apprehensive band out of the splendid bedchamber of Minos. Dripping the scant black drops, the withered yellow body of the old, old woman lay still on the floor behind them.

XXI.

Out in the planless maze of piled-up rooms and halls and stairs, where one chamber might be two steps above another, or three below, Theseus seized the dusty black pigtails of a palace stonecutter, who had joined them, and menaced him with the Falling Star, demanding:

"Where are the chambers of Ariadne?"

The frightened artisan shuddered, promised voicelessly to show the way.

All the palace was buzzing now, a disturbed human hive. Lamps and torches flared down dusky corridors. Men and women and children, slaves and free artisans who dwelt and labored in the vast pile, were screaming, running everywhere. Theseus and his men came upon a dozen more Minoan priests striving to barricade a passage, and fought again.

The steel sword led the pirates through the barrier, and every lancer died. But a coldness of dread was creeping up the spine of Theseus. It seemed to him again that success had been too easy.

Something was queerly wrong. A dozen riddles haunted him. Why had they met so few armed men—unless the palace was a trap? Where was Talos? What stand would Ariadne take? And what could he expect of the wall of wizardry? Why—most ghastly puzzle of all!—had

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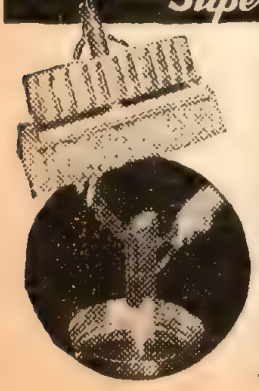

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Minos changed so strangely after he was dead?

The stonecutter led them to the spacious rich apartments of Ariadne. A sound of weeping met them, and they came upon a dozen red-clad temple girls. They were armed with bows and daggers, but they made no fight.

Theseus burst past them into the bedchamber. He tore aside the curtains, ripped the silken cover from the couch, flung open a great painted coffer, peered into the bath beyond. Ariadne was gone.

He seized one of the weeping girls by her scented hair, brushed her throat with the tip of the Falling Star, and asked the whereabouts of her mistress. The girl was speechless with fear.

"The goddess is gone!" she whispered at last. "She has fled—we don't know where!"

Theseus released the girl, stood baffled.

"Captain Firebrand!" That thin nasal croak was familiar. Theseus turned swiftly toward the doorway, found the squat form of Snish. The little Babylonian's yellow eyes were popping out with apprehension; teeth chattered in his huge mouth. "Captain Firebrand!"

"Snish—my friend!" Theseus greeted him with a relieved grin. "You've nothing to fear—my men have orders not to harm you. You're all right? How did you escape, that night at the grove?"

The little wizard waddled toward him, eagerly. "One of Ariadne's temple girls took a liking to me," he wheezed, "and kept me hidden." His enormous smirk showed huge yellow teeth. "Within limits, my small arts are useful in love!" The nasal voice sank. "Master, I have brought you a message from the goddess herself."

Theseus felt a little eager shudder. "From Ariadne?" He stepped

closed to Snish. "What is the message?"

The voice of Snish became a nasal whisper: "She is waiting in a tower on the roof. She begs you to come to her. I'll show you the way. You must leave your men behind."

For an instant Theseus stood still, weighing the Falling Star in his hands. He listened to the increasing ominous humming that filled the palace, looked from his grim, red-stained followers back to the pop-eyed frog face of Snish.

Decision steadied the sword. "Wait for me," he told the one-eyed cook. "But, if I have not returned in the time it would take a bard to sing the battle song of Tiryns, take what loot you can carry and rejoin Cyron."

"Aye, captain," muttered Vorkos. "But beware these warlocks!"

Turning to follow Snish: "Hasten!" whispered Theseus.

WADDLING swiftly, the little wizard led him through a net of corridors and stairs and connected rooms so intricate that Theseus lost sense of direction. At last, pressing open a door where no joint had been visible, Snish led the way up a dark winding flight.

Abruptly, at that hidden door, all the humming confusion of the alarmed palace was left behind. There was no sound on that black stone stair—but the very silence was tense, menacing.

Theseus held the torch high with one hand and clutched his naked sword with the other. His companions, he knew, could never follow him here. He was alone. His blade touched the puffing little wizard.

"If this is betrayal, Snish," he rasped the warning, "you shall be the first to die!"

The little Babylonian looked back against the torchlight, his seamed brown face both aggrieved and frightened.

"Master!" His nasal voice quivered huskily. "When I have risked my life to bring this message, can't you trust me?" He shuddered to a long noisy sob, blew his nose. "Haven't I proved myself? Haven't I saved your life a dozen times?"

"Perhaps," said Theseus. "Lead on—swiftly. I have warned you!"

The dark stair brought them up, at last, through the floor of a huge dim room. Dust set Snish to coughing, and the flaring torch cast eerie shadows into cobwebbed corners. Theseus peered hastily about, wondering.

The lofty walls were covered with racks of sealed, labeled jars that held papyrus scrolls. Stacked clay tablets made brown mountains. Long shelves were covered with odd-shaped vessels of metal, pottery, and glass. Sturdy, blackened benches bore implements of glass and polished metal, such as Theseus had never seen.

Perched upon a great, polished silver ball, that rose above a confusion of twisted black rods, gleaming copper wires and shimmering mirrors, was a huge black vulture. The bird's carrion reek filled the room. It moved a bald red head, following them with a flaming, malignant black eye.

Theseus set the trembling point of his sword against the back of Snish. "Wait!" he gasped. "What place is this?"

There was something curiously froglike in the little wizard's startled jump.

"This is the workshop of Daedalus, called the artificer," he croaked. "But trust me, master—and put away your sword!" His popping yellow eyes blinked earnestly.

"Truly, I am guiding you to the goddess. There is only one more flight to climb."

"Lead on," rapped Theseus. "But if we meet the warlock—he dies!"

The vulture made a raucous, startling scream, and the sinister eye followed them across the long dusty room. The torch found a narrow stair, and Snish led the way upward again. They came out upon a parapeted roof beneath the moon, and a gust of cold wind extinguished the burned-out torch.

Theseus stared ahead, speechless.

BEFORE THEM, gleaming under the moon, was such a thing as he had never glimpsed or imagined. It was vaguely like a ship, for there were broad sails of white linen, and slender yards of polished wood, and rigging of thin, bright wire. But the sails lay horizontal. The thing rested upon flimsy-seeming wheels. There was no proper hull, but only a tiny cabin, in the midst of the spidery web of wood and cloth and metal. A door opened in that cabin.

"Captain Firebrand!"

It was the voice of Ariadne, strong and golden, yet with a husky little catch in it.

"You came—I knew you would!"

She climbed down flimsy steps. The full moon caught the red waves of her hair, strong enough to show color. Her white body was tall and sinuous as ever, intoxicating in a low-cut gown of clinging green. The serpent girdle writhed about her slender waist, and the ruby eyes glittered balefully.

She came swiftly to Theseus. Smooth bare arms slipped about him, drew him to her. Her face lifted, white and alluring under the moon. Theseus kissed her—but he kept a firm grip on the hilt of the Falling Star.

Her clinging lips drew reluctantly away from his. She caught his tense sword arm, drew him toward that fantastic, unsubstantial construction.

"I'm so glad, captain!" Her voice throbbed huskily. "I have waited for you—and for Keke, my poor white dove, that was frightened by the fighting and flew away. But I'll leave Keke."

Her persuasive vibrant arm slipped around him again. "I knew that you would come to me, when your work in Crete was done. Because you promised. And I am ready, captain. We'll be in Egypt before dawn!"

Theseus held back. "What is this thing?"

"This is the most wonderful fruit of all the wizardry of Crete," she told him. "It is a machine, that flies like a bird. Daedalus built it—and it is safer than the first, fragile machine, that killed his son. It is moved with an engine of fire, and it can lift us safely over the sea to Egypt, as fast as a vulture flies."

Her warm arm tugged again. "Come, my captain!"

"But why must we go to Egypt?" demanded Theseus. "Tonight?"

"Don't you see?" Her golden voice was muted, pleading, anxious. "It is because of what you have done. You have destroyed the Dark One. You have slain Minos. You have raised the people, against all the warlocks and the gods."

Her warm body shuddered against him, and he felt the cold, writhing stiffness of the silver serpent.

"Don't you see?" She clung to him. "I must go, to save my life. The people would burn me in the temple of Cybele." Her tremulous lips kissed him. "But I waited for you, captain."

Theseus crushed her tall, slim body against him, kissed her until

they both were breathless. But he was watching Snish, over her shoulder, and he kept a good grasp on the Falling Star.

"Come on, my captain," she begged huskily. "The machine is loaded with my jewels and all the silver it can carry. If you aren't happy in Egypt, we can fly on, beyond, even to the edge of the world."

But Theseus waited, watchfully. "I'm not sure," he whispered, "that my task in Crete is done."

Her tall body tensed against him, and: "You have killed Minos," she protested quickly. "You have roused the people against the wizards and broken the power of the Dark One. What else have you to do?"

Theseus watched a white dove that came fluttering up out of the dark stairwell. It alighted on Ariadne's perfumed hair. She lifted a white hand, brought it down to her lips, kissed its beak.

"My little darling Keke!" she whispered. "My poor white dove. Was it lost? Is it afraid? Does it want to fly with us, on the wizard's wings, to Egypt?"

Cooing softly, the dove fluttered back to her shoulder. It cocked its head, and a bright eye looked at Theseus. That eye glittered under the moon. There was something familiar in its bright blackness, something—dreadful!

Ariadne reached for the hand of Theseus.

"Now, captain," her golden voice rang eagerly, "Keke has come back. Let's go—before the people storm the tower or fire it."

But Theseus had stepped swiftly back. The Falling Star was ready in his hand. As if itself alive, the steel blade flashed up through the moonlight, slashed off the head of the cooing dove.

The bird fell from the bare white shoulder of Ariadne. It fluttered on the roof and lay still. Her golden

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voice went sharp, in a cry of grief and anger.

"What have you done?" She sobbed. "My beautiful Keke!"

But Theseus stood back from her, alertly watching the white headless bird. He saw it swell under the moon, and change. It became a man's body, nude, dark, gnarled, hairy, shriveled with years. It was headless, like the bird, and thick black blood spurted from the severed neck.

Theseus found the shaggy black head, lying beyond the feet of Ariadne. He turned it over with his toe, so that he could see the face. Snarling up at him, hideous in death, he saw the dark, skeletal visage of Daedalus.

White and motionless, Ariadne made a small choked sound.

"No, I'm not ready to go with you to Egypt," Theseus told her in a slow, grave voice. "I believe that I have another task to do. If you wish to wait, I'll come back to you when it is done."

He turned to Snish.

"Come with me again," he told the popeyed, shuddering little wizard. "Find me the brass man, Talos. I want to see what he looks like—dead!"

The white features of Ariadne stiffened again with terror. Her mouth half opened. Her hands lifted in a frantic gesture toward her throat. Then it seemed that something paralyzed her. Her scream was stifled.

"I'll wait," she whispered.

And Theseus followed the quaking little wizard down the stair.

XXII.

THESEUS WALKED close at the heels of Snish, down into the black, dusty workroom of the dead warlock. The trembling yellow wizard lit a new torch from a dimly glowing brazier, and Theseus saw that the black vul-

ture was gone from its perch on the silver ball.

Snish was a sallow green with fear, and the torch fell out of his quivering fingers. Theseus picked it up and followed him down that narrow winding stair into the ancient pile of Knossos. He could hear the frightened clatter of the wizard's teeth.

"Once, in Babylon," came the sobbing nasal wheeze of Snish, "I was an honest cobbler. I had a wife who was faithful except when she was drunk—and that was seldom, for we were very poor."

He stumbled on the narrow stone steps, caught himself. "Knossos will kill me yet!" he gasped apprehensively. "And I was happy in Babylon—if I had only known it—until that magician brought me his boots to mend. I wish that I had never heard of wizardry!"

He paused on a narrow landing, and his huge yellow eyes blinked fearfully against the torch.

"Master," he croaked hollowly, "have you thought what you are doing? This brazen man has no humanity. He knows no pity. He may squeeze the life out of me, for letting you disturb his slumber. And he'll surely destroy you, Captain Firebrand. In a thousand years, he has not been vanquished."

His trembling hands made an urgent gesture. "Why don't you forget this folly, master?" he wheezed uneasily. "Why leave your bones to rot in the pits of Knossos—when there is a goddess waiting for you?"

Theseus came up to him, clutching torch and sword. "I came to Crete to do a task." His voice rapped hard. "It isn't done. Lead on."

With shuffling, uncertain steps, Snish guided him ahead. It began to seem a little ominous to Theseus that they came to no open court or shaft, saw no light burning, found no human being. Only once, for a moment, did they hear any sound—distant shouting and the far-off clash of arms.

"What is that?" demanded Theseus.

Snish paused and turned to listen, and it seemed to Theseus that his bulging yellow eyes were staring through the damp black walls. His huge bald head nodded slowly.

"That is your comrade, Cyron the Gamecock," he said. "He has come to join your men, and they are hunting the last of the Minoan priests to their lairs. This night is indeed the end of wizardry in Crete!"

"Cyron?" Theseus stared doubtfully at Snish. "But I left him to hold the compound!"

Snish listened again, at the niter-crusted wall.

"The Gamecock is telling your one-eyed cook what happened. He left three women to tend the watch fires in the palisade, and laid an ambush for the Etruscans on the road from Ekoros. He convinced them that the people had risen against them. They took the compound and fortified themselves to wait for day."

"Good old Gamecock!" Theseus grinned, returned to frowning soberness. "Lead on, wizard."

He followed Snish, and the dim sounds faded. They descended into a dank, brooding stillness that Theseus well knew, from the time he had been in the dungeon. It was the silence and the fetor of death.

Following on closely, Thessus coughed from the acrid sting of decay in the air. He started to the dull, hollow echo of their footsteps. Suddenly it seemed to him that Snish, for a stranger newly come from Babylon, was ominously familiar with this dark labyrinth. He

hung back, at a long hall's entrance.

"Where are you taking me?" Apprehension croaked in his own throat. "Where is Talos?"

Snish pointed down the black-pillared hall.

"We can wait here, master." His huge yellow eyes rolled uneasily, and his voice was a rasping whisper. "If you still seek to die. For Talos will come this way."

Theseus looked anxiously down the lofty avenue of square black columns, but nothing moved among them. He listened, and heard only the hissing crackle of the torch and his own hastening heart.

"We'll wait," he said. "But how do you know that Talos will come?"

The yellow eyes of Snish blinked at him, gravely. "I'm a wizard," wheezed the squat Babylonian, "if only a very minor one." He came waddling back to Theseus, his ugly, wide-mouthed face pale and tense in the torchlight. "I know another small device, master," he wheezed, "that can serve when Talos comes!"

Theseus stepped back, watchfully. "What is that?"

Snish reached out a quivering hand. "Give me your sword, master," came his nasal rasp. "My insignificant arts can make it invisible, so that you will seem to stand facing Talos with empty hands. That small advantage might well decide the fight."

But Theseus held the sword, set its bright point against the wizard's middle.

"The Falling Star has served me well," he rapped. "And it will again —as it is!"

The yellow flame of the torch flared brighter in the yellow eyes of Snish. They seemed to expand. Their glare, for a moment, was almost terrible. They reminded Theseus— But Snish was abruptly shivering and breathless.

"M-m-m-master!" he stammered faintly. "It's T-T-T-Talos!" His quivering yellow arm pointed past Theseus, down the brooding hush of the black colonnade. "The b-b-b-brass man, coming—"

Gripping the sword, Theseus crouched and turned. There was only darkness between the rows of columns. He moved the torch, and silent, monstrous shadows leaped among them. But there was no gleam of brass, nor any tread of metal feet. Swiftly, he turned again.

Snish was gone. Where he had been, stood—Talos!

THE BRAZEN GIANT was bending. The torchlight shone on his bright, flexing skin, and his flaming eyes were huge yellow lamps. Splendid muscles bulged his colossal body, and tendons thrummed like lyre strings. The fist of Talos, knotted into a huge brazen mace, was descending in a swift and deadly blow.

Theseus ducked. He swung the Falling Star, putting all his strength into a swift, instinctive thrust. The mighty fist slipped past his shoulder. And the steel nicked the mighty beam of the giant's forearm.

Theseus leaped back. "*You*—" he whispered. "Talos!"

His prompt defense had been all automatic. Now belated terror toppled upon him like a falling wall. Cold sweat covered him, and his quivering hand loosened on the Falling Star.

Talos crouched lower, uttering a tremendous brazen cry of pain and rage. It was like the bellow of some monstrous beast. Slow drops of liquid flame dripped from the slashed wrist. They spattered into little blazing pools on the stone floor.

"Well, Captain Firebrand!" The sudden laughter of Talos was deafening thunder in the long hall, and his yellow-flaming eyes were brighter than the torch. "If you could see the look on your face!"

Both gleaming fists balled, he stalked upon Theseus.

"Talos, you see, was no fool, after all!" boomed that terrible voice. "For he was also the little Babylonian cobbler, who was always aiding you, captain—to reach this moment of your destined death."

The numbed brain of Theseus was groping back. The fearful little wizard, he realized, had always contrived to slip away just before Talos appeared.

The giant laughed again. "Snish came to aid you," rolled the voice of Talos, "because it was written in the screed of time that a red-haired Greek should win in the games, and vanquish the Dark One, and slay Minos—and written also that then the wizardry of Knossos should prevail again!"

Talos crouched lower.

"With the aid of Snish, all the destined events took place with the minimum of harm. When they had taken place, we had hoped for you to leave Crete, with the daughter of Minos—who offered to give herself up to you, for her father's sake. But you refused to go, and now your time has come to die!"

He brandished a mighty metal fist, and a drop of flame from his bleeding arm splashed the thigh of Theseus. He flinched, and the brass giant laughed again.

"Now, do you think that Talos was the fool?" The great voice rolled and reverberated among the massive black columns. "Or were you? Snish guided you past the wooden wall, and past the wall of brass. But, mortal, there is still the wall of wizardry. While it stands, Knossos cannot fall. Think of that—and die!"

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Bellowing like a brazen bull, Talos lumbered forward.

Theseus still shuddered from the shock of fear. The treachery of Snish had not completely surprised him, for he had clung to a resolve to trust no wizard. Yet it seemed to him now that he had let himself be guided to the door of final defeat.

He had accomplished nothing real. All his seeming victories had been no more than the moves of a toy man, in a game of the gods of Knossos. He was certain, now, that the old woman had not been Minos. Talos, he thought, would surely kill him now. And the reign of wizardry would continue, as if he had never striven to end it.

Theseus leaped aside from the ponderous rush of Talos, and his eyes flashed down at the little black seal cylinder, hung by the thin silver chain at his throat. If Ariadne had promised him that wizardry could not prevail against the holder of the talisman, she had warned him, too, not to trust its efficacy.

Talos saw his glance, paused to laugh and roar a mocking question: "Mortal, was Talos the fool?"

No, Theseus thought, he himself had been, for Ariadne was a goddess of Crete. Her kisses must have been just one more move in the game. So must have been her gift of the black seal cylinder—and her lie that it was the wall of wizardry. Even her action in giving him the Falling Star when he went into the Labyrinth, he saw now, had only served to bring him here, face to face with Talos and death.

Ariadne, he bitterly perceived, had proved herself false. Mistress of wizardry herself, she had surely known that Snish was also Talos—yet had let him follow the little magician here, unwarned. Anyhow, Theseus told himself, woman or witch, her kisses had been sweet!

TALOS RUSHED again, and Theseus struck with the Falling Star. The steel blade slashed a mighty fist; drops of liquid fire oozed from bright metal. The furious bellow of Talos shook the columns and dislodged a shower of plaster fragments. He charged again.

Again Theseus leaped aside, beneath the flashing sword. The great fist just grazed his shoulder. But still the force of it staggered him, its heat blistered his skin. He stumbled back, wiping sweat out of his eyes.

The battle, he saw, could have only one ending.

His thrusts were merely painful. They inspired a certain brief caution in Talos, and won him a few more breaths of life. But he could hope to inflict no mortal wound. Already he was tiring, staggering. And mounting rage was swiftly overwhelming the brass man's caution.

Once his eyes flicked about, in desperate hope of aid or escape. But there was small possibility that his men could find him here—or aid him if they did. And Talos, huge yellow eyes blazing cunningly, kept between him and the entrance. He was helplessly trapped.

Theseus tried to side-step the next flailing blow. But, drugged with weariness and dread, he moved too slowly. The searing edge of the tremendous fist just touched his temple—and sent him spinning, to fall against the base of a square black column.

Red pain obscured his vision. His breath was gone. Struggling to drag himself upright, he found that the Falling Star was lost. He blinked his dimming eyes and saw the great foot of Talos come down upon the sword.

Hot brass hands reached down for the body of Theseus. He looked into the flaming eyes beyond them, and saw fearful, unexpected depths of

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rage and hate, and knew that those hands would twist his body like a rag, wringing out viscera and blood. But still he couldn't rise.

"Captain Firebrand!"

His ringing ears heard that urgent golden voice, and his clearing eyes saw Ariadne. She stood at the black hall's entrance, behind the brazen giant. The torch she carried flamed red against her hair, and green in her eyes, and white on her heaving breast.

"Captain—I lied to you!" Agony choked her. "Break the wall of wizardry!"

The bellow of Talos was raucously deafening. Frightful rage twisted the metal face, and hate flamed hideous in the yellow eyes. The giant dropped on his knees, and both gigantic fists came crushing down.

Theseus knew that he must obey Ariadne—if he had time! He snatched the little black cylinder, snapped the silver chain. Frantically his eyes searched for anything he could use for a hammer, to shatter it. But Talos knelt upon the sword, and there was nothing he could reach.

"Break it!" Ariadne was sobbing. "*Now!*"

Desperately, Theseus twisted at the talisman with his fingers. The hard black stone abruptly crumbled, as if it had been turned to friable clay, and crushed into dust.

Talos stiffened, and the great fists paused.

Theseus heard a tremendous rumbling—it was like the bellow of some unimaginably monstrous bull, he thought, lost in some deep cavern. And the floor pitched sharply.

"My daughter"—the great voice of Talos was muted, stricken—"why—"

The brass giant was flung back across the rocking floor. Staggering, he struck a great square column. It buckled, and huge black stones came toppling down. The squared capital, that must have weighed many tons, caught Talos on the shoulders.

Theseus snatched up his torch and the Falling Star. He came swaying to his feet. The floor still heaved like a deck in a storm. Dust was thick in the air. Walls were crashing everywhere, and beneath was still that monstrous bellow.

Gripping the sword, he swayed toward the brass man. But Talos, pinned under the fallen capital, was already dead. Already—changing!

THE HEAD that protruded from great black stone became human again. But it was not the head of Snish. The face was round and pink and dimpled, crowned with fine white hair. Even in death, the small blue eyes seemed to twinkle against the torchlight, in ghastly mockery of merriment.

"Minos!"

Theseus stumbled back, and the torch shook in his hand. "Then, the other—the old, old woman?"

Ariadne had come swaying through the raining débris to his side. Her cool green eyes were dry, but stifled sobs shook her tall body. She clung to Theseus. The rumble of the earth seemed to pause a little, and he could hear her thin, choked voice.

"She was my mother." She quivered against him. "And this—my father."

Theseus kissed her, tried to soothe her grief. Broken plaster and stone were falling about them, and he led her away. Presently they came out of the toppling ruin, into the long central court. A lurid, roaring pillar rose against the night above it, for the west wing was already burn-

ing. Shuddering, Ariadne clung to him.

"What is it?" whispered Theseus. "What has happened?"

"The wall of wizardry was a strong spell," came her dry, sobbing gasps, "that had guarded Knossos and my father from all harm, for many hundred years. Strains had grown up in the rocks, against the power of the spell, and the suspended laws of chance were waiting for revenge. The wall was like a dam. Its breaking released a flood of power—against my father's throne!"

But her warm arms clung to him. She dried her eyes, and lifted her face for his kiss, and it was white and beautiful beneath the flame of burning Knossos.

"I did it for you, Captain Firebrand," breathed her husky golden voice. "I should do it again. Because loving you has taught me that there is something in the human spirit that is more splendid than all wizardry. I renounce it all, for you."

Her serpent girdle was under the hand of Theseus. He felt it abruptly stiffen, and looking down he saw that the malific glitter had gone from the ruby eyes. He caught the dead metal, and straightened it, and drew it away from her waist.

Then, laying aside the Falling Star, he kissed her.

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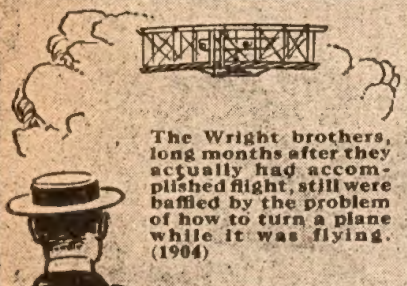 The Wright brothers, long months after they actually had accomplished flight, still were baffled by the problem of how to turn a plane while it was flying. (1904)	Thousands of schoolboys 14-16 years of age know more today about airplane design than the Wrights knew at Kitty Hawk.
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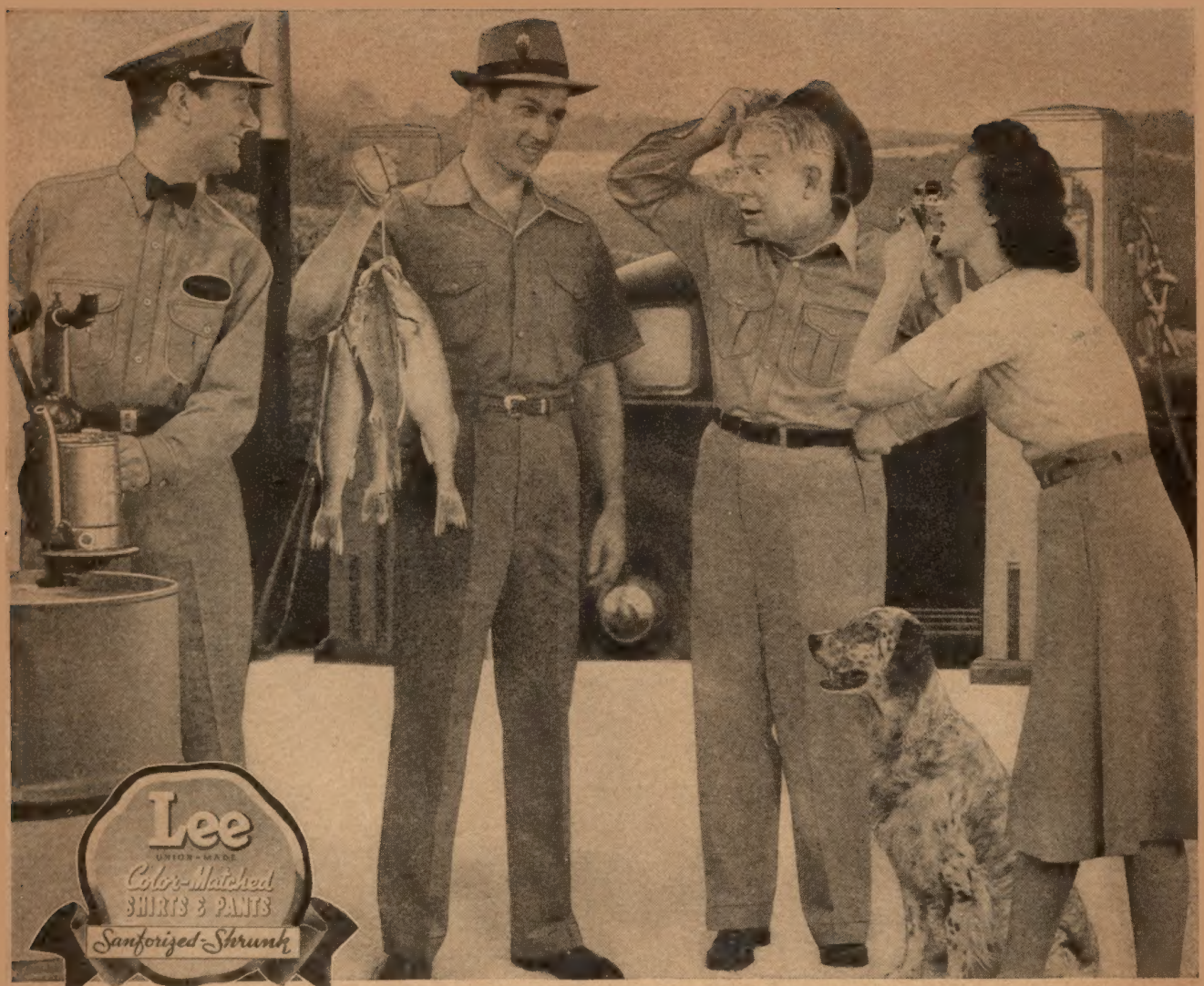

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